

Action Stories of Every Variety

ARGOSY



OCT.
26

ISSUED WEEKLY

10¢
Canada 15¢



The Treasure on Skeleton Key

By Loring Brent

*And Great Stories by John Wilstach - Eugene Cunningham
Oscar J. Friend - Robert Terry Shannon and others*

Neivest Styles

Dignified Credit at Saving Prices

10 DAYS' FREE TRIAL

Sent for 1 Balance 12 MONTHS TO PAY

Guaranteed Savings

Direct Diamond Importations and large volume buying for both our National Mail Order business and our Chain Store system enable us to offer you superior quality genuine diamonds, fine standard watches and exquisite jewelry at saving prices which are beyond comparison. All of this with no extra charge for the added convenience and advantage of dignified, liberal credit.

How to Order

Just send \$1.00 with your order and your selection comes to you on 10 Days' Free Trial. No C.O.D. to pay on arrival. After full examination and free trial, pay balance in 12 equal monthly payments.

Satisfaction Guaranteed

10 Days' Free Trial

You have the full privilege of 10 days' free trial—if not completely satisfied return shipment at our expense and the entire deposit will be refunded. Written guarantee bond with every purchase.

All Dealings Strictly Confidential

A whole year to pay! No extra charge—no red tape. You take no risk—satisfaction absolutely guaranteed or money back.

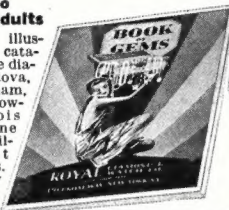
Gift Cases Free

Every article comes to you in a most beautiful and appropriate presentation case.

Send for this CATALOGUE

FREE To Adults

Completely illustrated new catalog of genuine diamonds. Bulova, Elgin, Waltham, Hamilton, Howard, Illinois watches, fine jewelry and silverware at special prices. Write now to get your Free Copy.



ESTABLISHED 1895
ROYAL DIAMOND AND WATCH CO.

Address Dept. 42-X, 170 Broadway, New York

\$50.00



DT1—Newest Butterfly design, of 18K Solid White Gold engagement ring set with sparkling, genuine blue-white diamond. \$4.08 a mo.

\$29.50



DT28—Gorgeously hand engraved 18K Solid White Gold "Bridal Blossom" wedding ring; 5 fiery genuine blue-white diamonds. \$2.37 a mo.

\$75



DT23—Modern, square-prong, engagement ring in new "step" design 18K Solid White Gold set with specially selected dazzling, genuine blue-white diamond. \$6.16 a month.

No Red Tape No Delay

\$50



DT7—New, massive, gentleman's ring of 14K Solid Green Gold and 18K Solid White Gold top; with a flashing, genuine blue-white diamond. \$4.08 a month.

12 Months to Pay

\$42.50



DT27—The "Bridal Blossom"—Hand pierced lace design engagement ring of 18K Solid White Gold, genuine blue-white diamond of rare brilliance. \$3.46 a mo.

\$48.50



DT12—Dazzling cluster of 7 perfectly matched genuine blue white diamonds; hand pierced 18K Solid White Gold lady's mounting. Looks like \$750 solitaire. \$3.96 a mo.

\$42.50



DT10—Gorgeous lace design hand pierced 18K Solid White Gold dinner ring; 3 fiery, genuine, blue-white diamonds; 2 French-blue sapphires. \$3.46 a mo.

\$29.50



DT26—Latest style, modernistic effect 18K Solid White Gold lady's ring; fiery genuine blue-white diamond. \$2.37 a month.

\$37.50



DT8—Diamond wrist watch. 14K Solid White Gold engraved case; 2 genuine diamonds, 8 emeralds or sapphires. Guaranteed, 15-jewel movement. Pierced flexible bracelet with sapphires or emeralds to match. \$3.04 a month.

\$24.50



DT9—The "Princess Pat"—14K Solid White Gold engraved case, guaranteed 15-jewel movement. Engraved genuine "Wristocrat" flexible bracelet to match. \$1.96 a month.

\$27.50



DT19—Nationally known 15-jewel WALTHAM movement; 20-year warranted engraved White Gold filled, 12 size, thin model, decaagon case. Tested and regulated. White Gold filled knife, fine Waldemar chain. All complete in handsome gift case. \$2.21 a mo.

IT'S A BULOVA \$29.75



DT5—Nationally advertised guaranteed 15-jewel Gent's BULOVA watch. White Gold filled case, "dust-tite" protector; radium dial and hands; latest style woven wrist band to match. \$2.59 a mo.

CASH PRICES AT CREDIT TERMS

“How We Saved Our First \$500”



“MARY and I had been married four years, but we couldn’t save a cent. Fact is, we were constantly in debt and I was always worried for fear I would lose my position.

“Then one night I saw that something must be done, so I told Mary I was going to take up a course with the International Correspondence Schools. ‘I’ve been hoping you would,’ she said. ‘I know you can earn more money if you try.’

“So I started studying at night, in the spare time that used to go to waste. Soon I began to see it was helping me in my work. A new position was open and the Boss gave me a chance at it because he’d heard I was studying with the I. C. S.

“Well, that was the start. Before the end of the year I received another raise in salary and we began to save each week. We’ve got \$500 in the bank now and we’re going to have a lot more soon.”

For thirty-eight years the International Correspondence Schools have

been helping men to win promotion, to earn more money, to get ahead in business and in life. They will help you too if you will only make the start.

INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENCE SCHOOLS Box 2247-D, Scranton, Penna.

Without cost or obligation, please send me a copy of your booklet, “Who Wins and Why,” and full particulars about the course before which I have marked X in the list below:

TECHNICAL AND INDUSTRIAL COURSES

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Architect | ☐ Automobile Mechanic |
| ☐ Architectural Draftsman | ☐ Aviation Engines |
| ☐ Building Foreman | ☐ Plumber and Steam Fitter |
| ☐ Concrete Builder | ☐ Plumbing Inspector |
| ☐ Contractor and Builder | ☐ Foreman Plumber |
| ☐ Structural Draftsman | ☐ Heating and Ventilation |
| ☐ Structural Engineer | ☐ Sheet-Metal Worker |
| ☐ Electrical Engineer | ☐ Steam Engineer |
| ☐ Electrical Contractor | ☐ Marine Engineer |
| ☐ Electric Wiring | ☐ Refrigeration Engineer |
| ☐ Electric Lighting | ☐ R. R. Positions |
| ☐ Reading Shop Blueprints | ☐ Highway Engineer |
| ☐ Telegraph Engineer | ☐ Chemistry |
| ☐ Telephone Work | ☐ Pharmacy |
| ☐ Mechanical Engineer | ☐ Coal Mining Engineer |
| ☐ Mechanical Draftsman | ☐ Navigation ☐ Assayer |
| ☐ Machine Shop Practice | ☐ Iron and Steel Worker |
| ☐ Toolmaker | ☐ Textile Overseer or Supt. |
| ☐ Patternmaker | ☐ Cotton Manufacturing |
| ☐ Civil Engineer | ☐ Woollen Manufacturing |
| ☐ Surveying and Mapping | ☐ Agriculture ☐ Fruit Growing |
| ☐ Bridge Engineer | ☐ Poultry Farming |
| ☐ Gas Engine Operating | ☐ Mathematics ☐ Radio |

BUSINESS TRAINING COURSES

- | | |
|--|---|
| ☐ Business Management | ☐ Business Correspondence |
| ☐ Industrial Management | ☐ Show Card and Sign Lettering |
| ☐ Personnel Management | ☐ Stenography and Typing |
| ☐ Traffic Management | ☐ English |
| ☐ Accounting and | ☐ Civil Service |
| ☐ C. P. A. Coaching | ☐ Railway Mail Clerk |
| ☐ Cost Accounting | ☐ Mail Carrier |
| ☐ Bookkeeping | ☐ Grade School Subjects |
| ☐ Secretarial Work | ☐ High School Subjects |
| ☐ Spanish ☐ French | ☐ Cartooning |
| ☐ Salesmanship | ☐ Illustrating |
| ☐ Advertising | ☐ Lumber Dealer |

Name.....

Address.....

City.....State.....

Occupation.....

If you reside in Canada, send this coupon to the International Correspondence Schools Canadian, Limited, Montreal, Canada

ARGOSY

ISSUED WEEKLY

VOLUME 207

CONTENTS FOR OCTOBER 26, 1929

NUMBER 4

SERIALS

- The Treasure on Skeleton Key** (Three Parts. Part I) . . . Loring Brent 437
Mystery and romance off the Florida coast
- The Hawk of Hazard** (Five Parts. Part II) . . . Oscar J. Friend 496
A knight of the Old South
- Almost a Gentleman** (Four Parts. Part III) . . . Robert Terry Shannon 528
Racketeering in New York
- War Above the Timber Line** (Four Parts. Part IV) . . . J. E. Grinstead 556
An epic of the real West

COMPLETE STORIES

- Red Decks** (Short Story) . . . Eugene Cunningham 454
Gunning for U-boats
- Hey, Rube!** (Novelette) . . . John Wilstach 465
A war of the circus lots
- Dirty Linen** (Short Story) . . . John A. Thompson 516
A new racket in the fight game
- Ballyhooley** (Short Story) . . . Thomas Thursday 548
Selling bottled bunkum

OTHER FEATURES

- COVER DESIGN** . . . Howard V. Brown
- St. Jerome** . . . Theodore Roscoe 515
- Kangaroo Freaks** . . . Wyman Sidney Smith 527
- Free Radiograms** . . . Harold J. Sullivan 555
- Argonotes** . . . 574
- Looking Ahead!** . . . 576

This magazine is on sale every Wednesday throughout the United States and Canada

THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY, 280 BROADWAY, NEW YORK, N. Y., and

LONDON: HACHETTE & CIE.,

16-17 King William Street, Charing Cross, W. C. 2

WILLIAM T. DEWART, President and Treasurer

PARIS: HACHETTE & CIE.,

111 Rue Réaumur

C. T. DIXON, Vice-President

PUBLISHED WEEKLY AND COPYRIGHT, 1929, BY THE FRANK A. MUNSEY COMPANY.

Single copies, 10 cents; by the year, \$4.00 in United States, its dependencies, Mexico and Cuba; \$7.00 to Canada and Foreign Countries.

Remittances should be made by check, express money order or postal money order. Currency should not be sent unless registered

Entered as second-class matter November 28, 1896, at the post-office at New York, under the Act of March 3, 1879

The entire contents of this magazine are protected by copyright, and must not be reprinted without the publishers' permission

TITLE REGISTERED IN U. S. PATENT OFFICE

COPYRIGHTED IN GREAT BRITAIN

Grocery Bills all Paid -and \$10 a Day Besides!

THAT'S MY NEW OFFER TO YOU

If you want plenty of money to pay all your grocery bills—and \$10 in a day besides—just send me your name and I'll give you some money-making facts that will open your eyes. I'll show you how L. C. Van Allen, of Illinois, quit a \$23-a-week job, took hold of my proposition, and shortly afterwards reported earnings of more than \$100 a week. Gustav Karnath, of Minnesota—a farm laborer—accepted my amazing offer and cleared \$20.35 the first five hours. It's easy. The big money is waiting for you. You'll be astonished at the simplicity of my Money-Making Plan.

Mrs. Hodges Makes \$18 to \$20 a Day

Not only men, but women, too, are making big money with my Quick-Profit Plan. Mrs. B. L. Hodges, of New York, says, "Never fail to make a profit of \$18 to \$20 a day." Mrs. K. R. Roof, of S. Carolina, cleared \$50 the first week in spare time. Mrs. Pearl Kelley, of W. Virginia, made \$50 the first 4 days and has cleared as high as \$26.23 in one

day. Scores of men and women are making quick, easy money just following my simple instructions. And right now I offer you the same opportunity I gave to them.

No Course of Training Necessary

These big profits are easy to make. You don't need any capital or previous experience. You don't have to take any course of training. You can start right in making money the very first day. All you do is act as my Representative in your locality and look after my interests there. This is what



Eugene Ducat did and he made \$45 the first 2 days. He had no experience to start with. You don't need any either.

Big Profits—Full Time or Spare Time

Your own home will be your headquarters. You set your own hours and work as you please. All orders for my groceries and other household necessities must go through your hands because I never sell through stores. You alone get the profits on all orders from your territory.

Send No Money

You don't risk a cent in accepting my offer. If you want to, you can keep your present job and start with me in spare time. Oscar Stuart, of W. Virginia, reports \$18 profits in 2½ hours' spare time. So get the facts at once. You have everything to gain—not a penny to lose. With grocery bills all paid and \$10 in a day besides, you will have plenty of money for new clothes, a radio, house furnishings, pleasure trips, etc. In addition, I will tell you how to get a new Ford Tudor Sedan absolutely free of cost. Here's a chance you can't afford to miss. Mail the coupon for these amazing new facts.

THE AMERICAN PRODUCTS CO.

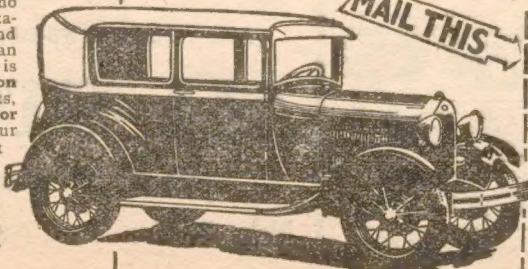
Albert Mills

President and General Manager

2380 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, O.

FREE NEW FORD TUDOR SEDAN

This is NOT a contest. Every man or woman who become my Representative can secure a brand new Ford Tudor Sedan free of cost. The car is given to you in addition to your large cash profits, as an extra reward or bonus, and becomes your personal, permanent property. If you already have a car I will give you the cash instead. Mail coupon for full information about this generous automobile offer.



MAIL THIS

Albert Mills, Pres., American Products Co.,
2380 Monmouth Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio.

Send me, without cost or obligation, all the facts about your wonderful new proposition that offers cash to pay all my grocery bills and \$10 in a day besides. Also explain your FREE Ford Offer.

Name.....

Address.....

© A. P. Co. (Print or Write Plainly)

CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING

The Purpose of this Department is to put the reader in touch immediately with the newest needs for the HOME, OFFICE, FARM, or PERSON; to offer, or seek, an unusual BUSINESS OPPORTUNITY, or to suggest a service that may be performed satisfactorily through correspondence. It will pay a housewife or business man equally well to read these advertisements carefully.

November 30th Classified Forms Close November 5th.

AGENTS & SALESMEN WANTED

YOU CAN MAKE BIG MONEY IN THE FOOD BUSINESS

NO CAPITAL OR EXPERIENCE NEEDED. CREDIT GIVEN. HERE IS YOUR CHANCE TO ESTABLISH A PERMANENT BUSINESS—YOUR OWN IN EXCLUSIVE TERRITORY. WE FURNISH FREE SAMPLE CASE AND FREE SAMPLES FOR CUSTOMERS. REPEAT ORDERS EVERY WEEK. ASK NOW. FEDERAL PURE FOOD CO., M2311 Archer, Chicago.

WE START YOU WITHOUT A DOLLAR. 150% PROFIT. SOAPS, EXTRACTS, PERFUMES, TOILET GOODS. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. FREE SAMPLE CASE. AUTO FURNISHED. CARNATION CO., 140, ST. LOUIS, MO.

UNUSUAL OPPORTUNITY—\$100 WEEKLY SELLING BETTER QUALITY, ALL-WOOL union-made-to-measure suits and topcoats at \$23.50 and \$31.50. Build big repeat business. Liberal bonus for producers. Large swatch samples FREE. W. Z. GIBSON, INC., 500 Throop, Dept. J-409, Chicago.

BIGGEST SURPRISE OFFER EVER MADE. BE SURE TO ANSWER THIS AD. My line of Soaps, Coffee, Tea, Spices, Toilet Articles, Household Specialties, pays you bigger profits. M. G. BOTH, President, 2714 Dodder, St. Louis, Mo.

BIG Money Daily selling Shirts of all kinds, Lumberjackets, Underwear, Hosiery, Sweaters, Playsuits, Overall, Pants, Raincoats, Leather Costal Outfit FREE! Experience unnecessary. NIMROD CO., Dept. 55, 4922-28 Lincoln Ave., Chicago.

WOMEN GO WILD OVER GORGEOUSLY BEAUTIFUL RAYON SILK BEDSPREADS! ORIGINAL! DIFFERENT! NEW EVERYWHERE! WILDFIRE SELLER! Gorgeous Full Size Swatches Free! BAKER COMPANY, Salisbury, N. C.

HELP WANTED—MALE

FIREMEN, BRAKEMEN, BAGGAGEMEN (WHITE OR COLORED), SLEEPING CAR, TRAIN PORTERS (COLORED), \$150—\$250 MONTHLY. EXPERIENCE UNNECESSARY. 836 RAILWAY BUREAU, EAST ST. LOUIS, ILL.

MICHIGAN FARM LANDS FOR SALE

MONEY MADE IN MICHIGAN POTATOES. \$10 DOWN NOW AND EASY TERMS BUYS LAND NEAR MARKETS, LAKES, STREAMS. WRITE TODAY. SWIGART & CO., M-601, 32 NO. STATE ST. BLDG., CHICAGO.

TOBACCO

TOBACCO HABIT BANISHED. NO MATTER HOW LONG YOU HAVE BEEN A VICTIM, no matter how strong your craving, no matter in what form you use tobacco, there is help for you. Just send postcard or letter for our FREE BOOK. It explains everything. NEWELL PHARMACAL CO., Dept. 845, Clayton Station, St. Louis, Mo.

PATENT ATTORNEYS

PATENTS. BOOKLET FREE. Highest references, Best results. Promptness assured. Send drawing or model for examination and advice. WATSON E. COLEMAN, Registered Patent Lawyer, 724 Ninth Street, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS—Write for our free Guide Book, "How To Obtain A Patent" and Record of Invention Blank. Send model or sketch and description of Invention for Inspection and Advice Free. Reasonable Terms. Prompt Service. Highest References. VICTOR J. EVANS & CO., 762 Ninth, Washington, D. C.

INVENTORS—Write For Our Guide Book, "How To Get Your Patent," and evidence of invention blank. Send model or sketch for inspection and instructions Free. Terms reasonable. RANDOLPH & CO., Dept. 412, Washington, D. C.

PATENTS AND INVENTIONS

INVENTORS: WE HAVE BEEN IN BUSINESS 30 YEARS. IF YOUR INVENTION OR PATENT HAS MERIT. SEND DETAILS OR MODEL. OR WRITE. ADAM FISHER MFG. CO., 249 ENRIGHT, ST. LOUIS, MO.

MYSTERY STORIES! at Bargain Prices

Send today for free circulars of Mystery Stories at bargain prices—many by world famous authors.

McKinlay, Stone & Mackenzie, Dept. 16
114 East 16th Street New York, N. Y.

All the World



Loves a Lover

and loves to
read

Love Stories



ALL-STORY

A NEW MAGAZINE

featuring

Love Stories of the American Girl

ASK YOUR NEWS-DEALER FOR

ALL-STORY

20 cents a copy.

Nov. 2nd issue on sale Oct. 30th

ARGOSY

ISSUED WEEKLY

VOLUME 207

SATURDAY, OCTOBER 26, 1929

NUMBER 4



The man in the stern was sharply etched against the sky

The Treasure on Skeleton Key

*Mystery and enchantment lurk in the tropical isles off Florida's Gulf Coast
—mystery that spells danger to young Tommy Varden*

By **LORING BRENT**

Author of "Bringing the Boom to Vingo," "Vingo's Benevolent Bloodhounds," etc.

CHAPTER I.

"HAUNTED."

THE grim young man who had held himself so aloof throughout the long train journey from New York began gathering his things together. He folded up a large blue map

of what appeared to be an archipelago and placed it in one suitcase. The map was followed by a yellow pad and a thick red pencil. He snapped the fasteners on the two suitcases and buckled the straps.

The porter reached for his hat and held it up to brush it off; but the grim

young man firmly removed it from his hand, with a "Never mind, George. Where I'm going, rust and moss do not corrupt and thieves do not break in and steal."

The black man grinned. The two pretty finishing school girls across the aisle, who were going farther south to spend the Easter holidays, gazed up at the grim young man as if hopeful of seeing, at last, some human expression on his countenance.

They had been gazing at him shamelessly since the train had left the Pennsylvania Station—enchanted by his drawn, white face, his deep-set, tragic, sapphire eyes, in which they romantically read heartbreak and mystery; and more than a little piqued by his indifference to them. They had given him every opportunity to break the ice, to begin two beautiful friendships, but he had ignored every overture.

Now, his grim, white, fascinating face was set in the same stern, forbidding lines; his smoldering, tragic eyes remained oblivious of the two girls' existence.

It is a fact generally accepted that hell hath no fury like a woman scorned. This old tribal belief was exemplified now by the blond, blue-eyed, dimpled one. At Savannah, she had confided to her companion that she would readily become so much putty in the hands of a man with eyes like his. She now inquired in a crisp voice of the hovering porter:

"What town is this?"

"Green Harbor, ma'am."

"Never heard of it," stated Dimples.

"Marge, did you ever hear of it?"

"No. Never," said Marge. "What do they do here?"

"Fish," said the porter.

"You mean, it's a fishing village?"

"Yes, ma'am."

The two girls looked with intensified interest at the tall, grim young man, their eyes fairly snapping with curiosity. Ignoring them, he picked up a leather rifle case and followed the porter and his two suitcases down the corridor and out of the lives of the finishing school undergraduates.

Said Marge: "Conceited!"

Said Dimples: "I insist that he is suffering a secret sorrow."

"Well," sighed Marge, "Heaven knows we gave him plenty of opportunities to share it."

Dimples therewith coined an epigram: "The most interesting men you see are the ones you never meet."

"Perhaps he's being true to a wife."

"Nope. He hasn't the married look."

"Perhaps he's heavily engaged."

"If that is the case," Dimples said with a little snort, "his heavy sugar need have no worries about him looking at another woman. My theory is that he is bitter about women, and that he is absolutely off girls."

And in this observation, Dimples betrayed wisdom somewhat in advance of her years.

TOMMY VARDEN, moving off down the corridor, was not in the least interested in such scraps of this chatter as came to his ears. Since the train had pulled out of New York, he had been only vaguely aware that the two pretty girls were seated across the aisle. Had he met either of them five minutes after alighting from the train, he would not have recognized her.

That department of his brain reserved for appreciating womankind might well have been under some powerful anæsthetic. His only reaction to the two pretty girls across the aisle was

a feeling of relief at putting all girls forever behind him.

As the Florida Special slowed down, he stooped and looked out of the corridor window. Pines were slowly marching past—the same procession of lonesome, underfed-looking pines he had seen marching past all day yesterday, through Georgia and the Carolinas. Pines and gray sand. Where were the palms under which he had hoped to lie, to convalesce from his illness, to rebuild his shattered faith? Where was the glittering jade-green water upon which he had planned to feast his world-weary eyes?

A galvanized corrugated roof appeared, then the glaring red tanks of a gasoline supply depot, then a cluster of shanties. The train stopped beside a small wooden station.

Tommy Varden alighted—and opened perhaps the most important chapter in his life.

A wave of flowery fragrance met him; made his senses swim. The air was like warm golden wine. Birds were singing. But there was no sign of pleasure in his moody eyes until, glancing down the crushed white shell road in the middle of which he stood, he saw the glimmer of jade-green water. His eyes brightened.

He was unaware that the train was pulling out, that the two pretty girls were craning their necks for a final fascinated glimpse of him.

In the doorway of the diminutive station a tall, lanky black man lounged, contemplating him with dreamy blue eyes.

Tommy Varden looked him over and said: "You busy?"

"No, suh." The negro shuffled over, grinning.

"You want to carry this stuff of mine down to the waterfront?"

"Yas, suh."

He picked up the two suitcases and stowed the rifle case under one arm, and they started down the street.

"What's your name?" Tommy asked him.

"Carruthers Jocelyn Mortmain, suh."

"What do people call you?"

"Blue, suh."

"Why?"

"'Cause Ah got blue eyes, suh. Reck-on mah granddaddy was a white man, suh."

"Lived here long, Blue?"

"All mah life, suh."

"Did you ever know that the name of this place used to be Gunpowder Bay?"

"Yas, suh."

"What's the name of this street?"

"Orange Street, suh. Used to be called Rum Road."

"Who told you that?"

"Ah disremember, suh. Dis used to be an old pirate town, suh."

"What do you do for a living, Blue?"

"Most anything that comes along, suh. In orange pickin' season, Ah works in de groves. Right now, Ah ain't employed."

"Can you cook?"

"Yas, suh; Ah sho' can!"

"How'd you like to work for me—do my cooking and general housework—fifty a month?"

"Yas, suh! Ah'm hired! Whuh bouts you gwine to live, suh?"

"Over on one of those islands."

VARDEN was not noticing Carruthers Jocelyn Mortmain when he answered this question, or he would have observed that the black man's jaw suddenly dropped and that his eyes grew suddenly large. They had

reached the dock which jutted out into the bay from the foot of the street that had once been known as Rum Road.

Tommy Varden, with dilating nostrils, was gazing across the expanse of shimmering green water to a group of low-lying islands perhaps a mile away. His eyes were shining with excitement. A hungry grin was at his mouth. Spots of color had appeared at his cheekbones. He sniffed the fragrant sea air, then drew in deep lungfuls.

He asked of his black companion: "Are any of these boats for sale?"

"Yas, suh."

"Who owns 'em?"

"Mr. Benjamin Tupples, suh. He lives over yonder in dat yaller house. Want Ah should fetch him?"

"Yep. Fetch him."

Blue departed. In his absence, Tommy Varden looked over the collection of motor boats tied up to the dock. One of them, the Barracuda, a twenty-five footer with a small hunting cabin and an opened canopied cockpit, attracted him. He was inspecting it when Blue returned accompanied by a red-faced man with sea-blue eyes, a golden growth of stubble on his cheeks, and a suspicious manner.

Tommy Varden introduced himself. "My name's Tom Varden, Mr. Tupples. I'm down here for my health. I've just been discharged from the hospital, after a siege of pneumonia, flu, pleurisy and a few other complications. I want to get off by myself, somewhere away from civilization so that I won't have to see people oftener than I can help. I heard I could pick up an island around here cheap."

Mr. Tupples surveyed him shrewdly.

"I'll sell you an island—for cash," he said finally. "We don't do much real estate business down here any more on a paper basis."

"I understand," said Tommy briskly, "that there are upward of fifteen thousand islands sprinkled along this coast." He grinned. "How much are you asking a dozen?"

Mr. Tupples did not return the grin. He was covertly examining Tommy's luggage; coming to the conclusion that a man owning such handsome suitcases must be a man of means.

"I've got one island, Palm Key, down the coast about ten miles from here with a little bungalow on it, with all modern improvements, including plumbing, an automatic electric pump and an automatic farm lighting plant. The house and improvements cost five thousand dollars. The island is better than forty acres at high tide. Two thousand cash takes it."

"How about those islands over there?"

"There's nothing on them."

"I can build. Lumber and labor ought to be cheap down here, and I don't want fancy trimmings."

"Dat big island down the coast," put in Blue anxiously, "is a mighty fine island, Mr. Varden. Dem islands yonder ain't much account. No, suh; dey ain't in a class with Palm Island."

"The island," said Tommy, "that I'm particularly interested in, used to be known as Starfish Key, because of its formation. It ought to be just one-eighth of a point north of west from this dock. I believe the name has been changed to Friendship Key."

"**D**AT'S de one—yonder," said Blue, and flung out a long skinny black arm. "But I won't work for nobuddy whut lives on that island. No, suh. Ah'll work fo' you on Palm Key, but not on Friendship Key."

Tommy looked at him curiously.

"Why not?"

"Ah don't like dese close-in keys. They's onhealthy."

"He thinks they're haunted," explained Mr. Tupples. "That's what all the colored folks around here think."

"Ah've seed ha'nts on dem keys and Ah've heard ha'nts on dem keys!" protested Blue. "When Ah was six or seven years old, I went past dem keys one time with my daddy, and we seed ha'nt lights risin' up and floatin' through the air—blue ones and green ones. An' we heard the screamin' of dat woman who was killed on Skeleton Key before Ah was born. Skeleton Key is ha'nted de-worst. But Friendship is bad. Friendship is right close to Skeleton. Yas, suh!"

Tommy looked from Blue to Mr. Tupples. The red-faced man was not smiling. His face was grim.

"They all say the same thing, Mr. Varden. Of course, we don't take stock in ghosts, but most people, white and black, give those keys a wide berth."

Tommy Varden was frowning. "I never heard of Skeleton Key. Which key is that?"

"The one just north of Friendship. It's separated by about a two-hundred-yard pass with as much as twenty fathoms of water in it at low tide—fast water and pretty dangerous. Most of the tidal water runs in and out of the bay through that pass. Skeleton is the only one of the keys that is inhabited."

"By ghosts?"

Mr. Tupples seemed displeased. His eyes narrowed a little and his mouth perceptibly hardened.

"No. There's an old man living over there with his granddaughter. His name is Cable. The negroes say that he and the girl are in league with spirits."

"Yas, suh, dat's so!" affirmed Blue.

"What do the whites think?" Tommy asked.

"The crackers think the same thing," Mr. Tupples answered.

"What do you think?"

"I haven't what you would really call an opinion. I only know that I have heard funny stories. Old man Cable meets anybody who lands on Skeleton Key with a shotgun. He came down and settled over there before my time, when the girl was nothing more than a baby. They live over there by themselves and never see anybody."

"'Cept ha'nts!" blurted Blue.

"I've speculated about them a lot," Mr. Tupples admitted. "It doesn't seem right to bring up a girl under conditions like that. I've seen her, and she is as pretty as a witch. He must have educated her, somehow; none of the people around here have ever met her."

"She's never come over here?"

"As far as I know, Mr. Varden, she's never been off that island."

"But what does he do for money? How do they live?"

"There is a rumor that he discovered treasure over there and that he digs up just enough of it two or three times a year to take north and sell for their living expenses. Hey!" he shouted. "Are you passing out? Grab him, Blue!"

The black man seized Tommy Varden only in time to save him from toppling off the dock into the water.

CHAPTER II.

A RENDEZVOUS WITH DEATH.

TOMMY VARDEN did not faint. When the spell of weakness passed, he found himself seated on one of his handsome suitcases. Blue was squatting before him, chafing his

hands and looking anxiously into his face. Tommy said feebly:

"I guess it was the sun. I've only been out of the hospital a few days and I'm still pretty weak. I'd better be getting settled. I want a motor boat, Mr. Tupples. This little cruiser with the hunting cabin—is she for sale?"

"I'll sell her."

"How much?"

"Five hundred, spot cash. The motor was brand new this spring. She's worth a thousand. She's in perfect condition."

Tommy removed that plump bank roll from his pocket; opened it and counted off five crisp new hundred-dollar bills.

"Stow my luggage aboard, Blue. Sure you won't change your mind about working for me?"

"No, suh," the negro said emphatically. "Ah won't work fo' you out dere. And Ah needs a job bad, too."

Blue remained on the dock. Mr. Tupples climbed down into the cockpit and stepped on an electric starter. The motor purred.

Tommy gave Blue two dollars for his services, then settled back in the stern seat and enjoyed the sea air and the scenery. He said presently, as the Barracuda nosed out into the bay:

"I take it the Cables never have visitors."

"Sometimes," Mr. Tupples answered, "I've been certain I've heard people out there; but I've never seen any one come or go. I'm pretty certain that I've heard the motors of fast boats over there on still nights, and other people have heard the same sounds. But I've never seen the boats."

"Are you sure," Tommy asked, "that he isn't in the rum-running trade?"

"I've thought of that. Maybe he is.

I've thought that maybe rum runners are using Skeleton Key as a sort of base—bringing the stuff in from Cuba and storing it there. Other boats might come and take it away, if it is a liquor storage place. But certainly, old man Cable isn't a bootlegger himself. All he has, so far as I know, is a rowboat with an outboard motor. He couldn't handle much liquor with that."

"If he isn't somehow connected with rum-running," Tommy said, "how do you account for his attitude toward strangers? Why does he want people to keep away from his island?"

"Perhaps," Mr. Tupples answered, "he is crazy; perhaps there's something in that treasure story. If I had an island with treasure on it, I'd meet visitors with a shotgun, too."

"Any way you look at it," said Tommy, "it's pretty tough on the girl."

Mr. Tupples suddenly whirled about and glared at him. His face was as pale as a face so red could become.

"Say!" he exclaimed. "You aren't a revenue officer, are you?"

Tommy shook his head.

"Because if you are, and if you've got evidence that old man Cable is running liquor, you'd be a fool to try to tackle it single-handed. Believe me, young fellow, that old man is dangerous, or he wouldn't be left alone the way he is."

"I'M not a revenue officer," Tommy stated. "I haven't the slightest interest, except normal curiosity, in old man Cable. I didn't know he existed until you mentioned it awhile ago."

Mr. Tupples continued to look suspicious. "It seems mighty strange to me that any man, especially a young man like you, should want to get so far off by yourself this way, and why you

should want to buy the island right next to old man Cable's island."

"There isn't any connection," Tommy answered. "I want to get off by myself because I've lost about all the faith I ever had in humanity. I've always wanted to live on a desert island."

"You said yourself there were fifteen thousand of them on the Gulf coast. I tell you, Friendship Key is dangerous. No, I don't believe in ghosts, but where there's smoke, there's fire. Keep away from these islands. Pick one farther south. That's my friendly advice."

Tommy Varden was gazing stonily beyond him at the low-lying form of Friendship Key, which was taking shape; attaining an individuality of palms and pines and underbrush and gleaming white sand.

"Why," Mr. Tupples indignantly demanded, "pick out Friendship Key especially?"

"Because one of my ancestors was washed ashore there in a shipwreck years ago. I've always had a romantic attachment to the place."

Mr. Tupples looked at him long and skeptically. Finally, with a shrug, he turned about, throttled down his engine and said:

"We'll drop anchor in this little cove. If you're going to live here, this will be the best place for your dock. It's protected from all winds, and there's plenty of water at low tide."

Mr. Tupples reversed the engine until the Barracuda was motionless. Then he walked forward around the foot-wide deck to the bows, heaved the anchor overboard and returned to the cockpit.

Tommy Varden had hauled in the tender and was unfastening the painter.

"You don't look strong enough yet

to hold an oar," Mr. Tupples said gruffly. "Sit back there."

So Tommy sat in the stern sheets while Mr. Tupples unshipped the oars and, with strong, short strokes, rowed them to the dazzling white beach.

Friendship Key was very much as Tommy had expected to find it: an island identical, except for size and shape, with any of the fifteen thousand islands of the Florida Gulf coast. It was covered with pines, palms, palmettoes, a certain amount of undergrowth, shells tossed up by storms, and sand as white as silver powder. It had an air of the primitive about it that strongly appealed to him. Palm trees rustled in the steady trade. Overhead, gulls wheeled and raucously called. The breeze was fresh and fragrant. Friendship Key might sometimes be hot, but it would always be breezy.

The two men walked to the northern end of it and looked across the pass to Skeleton Key. The tide was running out. The pass was covered with smooth, glossy areas, and from either shore the water was streaked with curved ripples.

Mr. Tupples announced, "They call it Dead Man's Pass." His voice was so dismal that Tommy laughed. His cheeks were flushed with excitement, and his eyes sparkled. To Mr. Tupples' indignant stare he said:

"After what you've told me about the place it must be an appropriate name."

"It is, in more ways than one," answered the red-faced man. "A lot of men have been drowned in that pass. There are bad currents in all these passes. They'll sweep the strongest swimmer out to sea, and there are currents in this pass that pull you down."

"I've seen lakes in the northern woods," said Tommy, "which are said

to be so deep that no man has ever found bottom. And I've taken the trouble to sound some of them. I've always found bottom. People like to make water mysterious.

"Look here!"

HE picked up a small block of driftwood at his feet and hurled it well into the pass. The block of wood floated off rapidly toward the deeper green of the Gulf of Mexico.

Tommy laughed and said, "Watch it—" He had been about to say, "Watch it sink!" when, suddenly, the block of wood vanished!

Mr. Tupples did not laugh with triumph. His eyes, stern and narrow, remained upon the spot where the little block of driftwood had gone down. For five minutes the two men watched. Then Tommy said uneasily:

"It may have been waterlogged."

"This is a dangerous piece of water," answered the red-faced man. He cried: "There it is!"

The little block of driftwood had mysteriously, magically, reappeared not more than three hundred feet from where Tommy had thrown it in. All that time it had been under water.

He looked across the pass toward Skeleton Key. He had so far seen no sign of human habitation, but now he saw a faint blue column of smoke rising to be snatched by the breeze and dissipated. It arose beyond the wall of trees, mysterious, somehow ominous, as if it were a signal.

Tommy gazed at the smoke for some minutes in silence. Then he glanced at his companion. The red-faced man's eyes were narrowed, but his mouth was hanging open and his hands, in front of him, were caught up in a curious paralyzed gesture which reminded Tommy of the way kangaroos hold

their front paws when they are sitting back on their tails.

"Early for dinner," said Tommy, glancing at his watch. "It's only ten o'clock."

Mr. Tupples relaxed and looked at him.

"Probably burning off some brush."

The two men finished their inspection of the island and returned to the Barracuda. As they purred back to the mainland Tommy said:

"You haven't told me how much you want for that island."

"A hundred dollars," said Mr. Tupples.

"Is the title clear?"

"Perfectly. It goes back in one jump to a charter granted a man named Henderson by one of the kings of England. Those old grants were O.K.'d when Florida joined the Union. I picked up a lot of water front land and all these islands from the Henderson heirs when I first settled here. I can give you a title to Friendship Key as clear as a bell."

TOMMY peeled a hundred dollar bill from his roll and yielded it to Mr. Tupples.

"You can make me out a bill of sale when we get ashore. Let me have the deed as soon as the transfer can be made."

"Right away," said Mr. Tupples. "I suppose you're going to put yourself up a house."

"A cabin," Tommy corrected him. "Can I get lumber, other building materials and carpenters here?"

"There's a sawmill on the edge of town. You can get nails, roofing paper and such stuff at Seth Jordan's store. He carries a complete line of pretty near everything, from prunes to giant outboard motors—quads. Every man

in town, pretty near knows how to handle a hammer. I'll round you up all the carpenters you'll need. How about a dock?"

"I want that up right away, too," Tommy affirmed.

"You can bunk with me," said Mr. Tupples, "till your cabin's ready."

"Thanks," said Tommy, "but I intend to sleep on my island to-night."

Mr. Tupples throttled down the engine. They were approaching the dock. He turned about.

"Look here, Mr. Varden; I'd hate to lose the sale of that island, because even a hundred dollar real estate sale these days is worth making, and I need money badly. But I'd like to give you back this hundred. I don't know you from Adam's off ox, but I wouldn't want my worst enemy to go out and live alone on that island. I mean it: I've only got a hunch, and maybe you'll laugh at me for being superstitious; but my hunch is that if you go out to that island you won't be seen alive again. Where there's smoke, there's fire. There's too many queer rumors floating around about old man Cable."

Tommy's face, as Mr. Tupples talked, had set into stubborn lines. He was an obstinate young man.

"I'll tell you what I'll do," said Mr. Tupples. "You go down there and live in that bungalow of mine on Palm Key. I won't charge you a dime's rent. You can live there for nothing until I find a buyer; and that's apt not to be for months, or maybe years. That's how strongly I feel about it. Don't live on Friendship Key—or you won't live long!"

"You're kind," said Tommy, "and I'm grateful. I'll make a confession, Mr. Tupples. I've got to live on Friendship Key. I've got a date there."

"With whom?" Mr. Tupples gasped.
"A dead man."

CHAPTER III.

THREAT.

UNTIL the sun of that day went down, Tommy Varden proved to any one who showed any curiosity on the subject, that he was a young man of quick decision and immense energy, in spite of the fact that he had only recently been discharged from a hospital.

Immediately on reaching the Florida shore he hastened to the lumber yard. With the aid of the yard foreman he estimated how much lumber he would need for a cabin fourteen feet square, with an eight by fourteen kitchen on behind, and an eight by fourteen screened porch in front; and how much heavier lumber he would require for the dock in Sunrise Cove. "Sunrise Cove" was his own selection. Certainly the cove faced east, toward the rising sun.

In gratifying a longing that is deep in the hearts of all men, Tommy was going to get as much fun out of playing Robinson Crusoe as was possible. He was already in love with his key, and he was determined not to be ousted from it by ghosts or crazy old men with shotguns.

He paid for the lumber he had ordered and secured the foreman's promise that it would be delivered to the dock as soon as mules could be hitched to a wagon. He then proceeded to Seth Jordan's general store and marveled that any store so small could contain such a variety of merchandise. He purchased roofing paper, nails in assorted sizes, hinges, bronze screen for windows, porch and kitchen, a cot,

blankets, an oil stove, and a long list of other necessities, as well as the provisions he would require.

Seth Jordan, a lanky, pasty-faced man with melancholy eyes, had already heard of Tommy's purchase of Friendship Key. He shook his head dolefully.

"Wouldn't want no son of mine livin' out on that key."

"Why not?" Tommy crisply asked.

"Apt to have trouble with old Ezra Cable."

"But it's my island."

"Hope you got a good gun and plenty ammunition—just in case."

"I've got a Winchester 30-40 and a .45 caliber Colt automatic," said Tommy.

"Plenty o' shells?"

"Plenty."

But Seth Jordan continued dolefully to shake his head.

Tommy went on down to the dock and found a load of lumber already in evidence. Beside it were sitting seven men, all in overalls. They were discussing some serious matter when Tommy walked up, but they fell silent as he approached.

Tommy assembled them about him and briefly described the cabin and the pier he wanted.

"I want the cabin finished by tonight. The pier can wait until tomorrow. Think you can finish the cabin by dark?"

"Reckon so," drawled one of the men.

"Get this lumber loaded, will you?"

Tommy directed the stowing of the first load of lumber aboard the Barracuda. As he was preparing to cast off, with his carpenters clinging to various parts of his ship, a tall negro came down the dock pushing a wheelbarrow in front of him.

Tommy waited. The tall black man with the wheelbarrow was none other than Carruthers Jocelyn Mortmain. Blue's eyes were prominent; he was working his mouth as if it were very dry. In the wheelbarrow Tommy recognized a portion of the order he had placed with Seth Jordan.

"YOU working for Mr. Jordan?" Tommy asked him.

"No, suh; boss man, Ah's workin' fo' you." Blue was very solemn.

"Oh, yes? I thought you'd decided not to work for me."

"Ah done changed mah mind. Ah—Ah done talked with mah mammy and mah pappy an' dey say—dey say dey hain't no ha'nts on Friendship Key—jes' on Skeleton."

Tommy scratched his head doubtfully.

"I don't know about you, Blue. I'm afraid if you heard a board squeak some night you'd start running, and if you got headed wrong you might run all the way across the Gulf of Mexico."

Blue's grin was feeble. "No, suh; Ah ain't one ob dem miracle men. If Ah hears boards squeakin' in the night Ah stays close by yo' side. Yas, suh!"

The carpenters were laughing.

"Boss man, Ah sho' wants dis job. Ah's a good cook, and Ah wants to work fo' you. Yas, suh. Ah knows quality when Ah sees quality. And yo's quality. Ah wants to buttle fo' you, Mr. Varden."

The black man was so anxious, the furrows in his sloping forehead were so deep and so plentiful, his eyes were so pleading, that Tommy grinned, and relented.

"All right, Blue; you can buttle for me. Your first job will be to finish

carrying the stuff down from the store. Then you stay here and keep your eye on it."

"Yas, suh."

Tommy started the motor and Blue cast off the lines.

WHEN the load of carpenters and lumber were landed on Friendship Key, Tommy showed the men where he wished his cabin built. He had selected for the site the only high spot on the key—a low hill at the crest of which stood a cluster of slim palms.

The palms would protect his roof from the heat of midday. The porch would face the green expanse of the gulf. Here, he had decided, would be an ideal place for a man to loaf and dream and rediscover his health and perhaps, in a measure, his lost happiness.

Palm boles were used for foundation posts. By noon the floor was laid and the scantlings for the walls were in place.

Over an open fire, built in a hole cupped out of the sand, Blue prepared lunch for Tommy and the carpenters.

Tommy was tired, but, for the first time in weeks, he was, if not happy, at least on the verge of that elusive emotion. After lunch he picked up five more carpenters, carried them back to the key and set them to work at building the pier.

Friendship Key rang with the civilized song of the hammer and the saw.

The trade wind made a rushing sound in the palms like rain. Gulls wheeled and called raucously overhead.

By three o'clock the last of the lumber and supplies had been transferred from mainland to island. The walls of the cabin were in place. The kitchen

and porch were taking shape. And the roof was going on. In Sunrise Cove, a row of posts extended out into the emerald water. At the inshore end, stringers were already in place, and flooring was being nailed down.

"Robinson Crusoe," Tommy Varden reflected, "had nothing on me." His breast swelled with that pride which can be known only to the man who has owned his own island. In this world, with its vanishing romance, its disappearing kingdoms, its growing cities, the quickening speed of its transportation and communication, only on the little islands which dot the seas can a man find that soul satisfaction which must have been enjoyed by the conquering kings of old.

"This is mine, to do with as I please!"

So, feeling somewhat exalted, the King of Friendship Key decided to circumnavigate his kingdom. It took Tommy approximately twenty minutes to complete the trip around his island, from Sunrise Cove to Sunrise Cove, in the Barracuda. Some other day he would explore the rest of the archipelago; some other day he might even become bold enough to explore Skeleton Key. His curiosity about his neighbors was becoming almost uncontrollable.

But Skeleton Key, as he skirted it in the pass, offered no sign of life. The wall of palms and undergrowth beside the pass was as impenetrable as the coastline of an unfriendly continent.

At half past six the last nail was driven home in the dock; and, a little later, the last tack was driven home in the bronze screen which inclosed the porch of the cabin. Tommy paid off the carpenters and motored them back to the village. When he returned Blue was in the kitchen preparing his sup-

per. All of the provisions he had bought were stowed neatly on shelves.

SUPPER, Blue announced, would be ready in half an hour.

"I'm going down to the beach to watch the sunset," Tommy informed him. "Yell when you're ready."

"Yas, suh!"

Tommy strolled through a lane of palms toward the crescent of white beach which marked the western boundary of his kingdom. This beach was as white as so much snow. Small waves were rolling in upon it, and when they broke their foam was as white as cotton wool. Tommy seated himself on a palm trunk that had been washed ashore in some recent storm. The sun was low on the horizon, so low that all the glare was out of it and it was as distinct as a rising full moon. As it settled on the horizon it seemed to bulge out on the sides, as if it were a ball of metal in a molten state. With dramatic swiftness it slipped over the western horizon, vanishing in a final mysterious lavender spark.

Tommy's mood of enjoyment was cut short by the unmistakable hoarse purring of an outboard motor. A black round-bottomed rowboat was putting out from Skeleton Key.

The young man on the palm trunk turned his head sharply. The rowboat was approaching. In the perfect light of afterglow every feature of the man in the stern of the black rowboat was sharply etched.

He must have been seventy-five years old.

The old man wore no hat. His hair was a bristling snow white shock. His face was brown and massive and square; innocent of hair except for a closely clipped white mustache. The lines of the old man's face ran down.

There were grooves running down from the nose and bracketing the thin, cruel mouth. And these were brackets within brackets. From the eyes wrinkles streamed down fanwise.

Tommy saw, as the boat came closer, that the old man carried in one hand a shotgun.

The bows of the black rowboat swung toward shore. The old man cut the motor and the boat came drifting in. Tommy stood up. His heart was beating at a noticeably increased tempo.

When the keel of the black rowboat grated on the sand the old man scrambled out and, with a painter, dragged the boat up on the beach.

Tommy, with steady eyes, advanced to meet the old man; and the old man, with the shotgun tucked, ready, under his right arm, came briskly up the white sand to meet him.

The old man thrust out his brown, prominent jaw and said:

"Who is building the house on this key?"

His voice was deep and discordant. It had harsh overtones and undertones. It was the kind of voice, so grating and so arrogant, that most people, had they heard it issue behind them, would have turned, instinctively frowning, to stare at the speaker.

Tommy realized that whereas he had playfully considered himself to be the king of Friendship Key, this old man seriously considered himself to be the emperor of the archipelago.

This estimate of his harsh-voiced visitor was promptly borne out.

"By what right," rasped the old man, "are you building a house on this key?"

"By right," Tommy pleasantly answered, "of purchase. I bought this key this morning."

"From whom?"

"Ben Tupples."

"THE title cannot be clear," the old man snapped, "It cannot possibly be clear."

Tommy said nothing.

"But," said the irritating old man with the shotgun, "I will buy it from you. I will pay what you paid for it plus the cost of that house you have built. How much did you pay for it?"

"A hundred dollars, Mr. Cable. That's your name, isn't it?"

"How much did you pay for the house and that pier?"

"They totaled about five hundred."

"Call it six in all."

"All right," said Tommy. "Call it six in all."

"I will pay you six hundred dollars," said the old man.

"This island, Mr. Cable, is not for sale."

"I'll give you a thousand cash for it."

"I'm sorry. I'm not selling."

"Two thousand!" barked the old man.

"Not interested. I'm here to stay, Mr. Cable. I understand that there are fifteen thousand islands along this coast. It happens that I prefer this island to the other fourteen thousand nine hundred and ninety-nine—and you have all those to choose from!"

Ezra Cable's black eyes were narrowed. His lips were now a hard gray line. Even his mustache seemed to bristle.

He said savagely: "I don't want you on this island. I know what you are! You're a sneaking busybody! You've come here to spy on me!"

"Mr. Cable," said Tommy patiently, "you'd be surprised how little interest I have in you. Let me make

you a proposition: You mind your business and I'll mind mine."

"I want you off this island!"

"I'm sorry, Mr. Cable; but I'm here to stay."

The old man framed a retort with his lips; but he did not utter it. A queer light gleamed momentarily in his black eyes. His jaws seemed to tighten again. Then, with a grunt, he turned and walked down to his boat. He climbed in, pushed off with an oar, and started his outboard motor with an angry yank on the cord.

Tommy walked down to the water's edge as the black bows swung toward Skeleton Key. The old man did not once look back, but there was that in the set of his shoulders, in the forward thrust of his head, which told Tommy as plainly as words that Ezra Cable would not let the matter rest so simply.

A deep, melancholy sound came down through the trees; a long-drawn "Y-o-o-o-o-o!"

It was Blue, calling him to supper. Tommy started toward his cabin. He was startled by the suddenness with which darkness had descended. The light of the world seemed abruptly to have been snuffed out.

CHAPTER IV.

TREASURE HUNT.

THE carpenters had built shelves along one wall of the combined living room, dining room, sleeping room. On these shelves, when supper was over, Tommy Varden arranged the contents of his two suitcases: shirts, underwear, socks, duck pants and so on. His forty-five caliber automatic pistol he tossed on his cot. A big-game rifle he stood in the corner at the head of the cot. To Blue,

who was watching all this with prominent eyes, Tommy explained:

"I am preparing to repel boarders."

"Yas, suh."

"If any ghosts come calling on us, we're going to use them for targets."

"Ain't no ha'n'ts on dis key," Blue asserted hastily. He returned to the kitchen and busied himself with the dishes.

Tommy seated himself at the rough table which had been built against the wall near the door into the kitchen. He placed a kerosene lamp with a white glass shade in the center of the table and removed from his hip pocket a large black leather wallet. From this with the greatest care he extracted a folded paper. It was yellow and brittle with age.

He carefully opened this antique document and spread it out on the table. It was a letter, written in a bold, flourishing hand. More than a hundred years ago, the ink had been black. Now it was a rusty brown. It would not have taken a handwriting expert to decide that the writer of this letter had been reckless, generous and adventurous.

The letter was dated October 14, 1816; Maracaibo. It had been written by his great-great-grandfather, John Varden, to his great-great-grand-uncle, Ebenezer Varden. Tommy knew the letter by heart, but he read it again now as if each word carried a fresh and novel importance, which, indeed, each word did.

The letter read:

MY DEAR BROTHER EBENEZER:

Ye surgeon here tells me that ye amputation of my right leg at ye hip has not been a successful operation and that I am not much longer for this life. I therefore make haste to assign to you such of my personal fortune as re-

mains, to distribute, according to your lights, among my heirs. It comprises chiefly jewelry of value unknown to me; about seven thousand dollars in American trade dollars, and a lesser amount in olden Spanish doubloons and double doubloons.

My fortune you must come and get. You will find it if you have ye spirit for a merry hunt, which I greatly misdoubt, knowing as I well do yr counting room tastes and yr faint stomach for hardy experience.

Come seek my treasure, Brother Ebenezer! You proceed to ye wild west coast of ye Peninsula of Florida. Fear not ye Indians. If they scalp you and roast yr heart on burning fagots, remember that many a braver man has gone in that fashion to his Maker.

Proceed, as you will, to ye port of Gunpowder Bay, which, I make haste to warn, is a resort of pirates and freebooters. Take you a small boat from ye foot of Rum Road and proceed one and one eighth nautical miles to ye Isle known as Starfish Key, a name which I gave. Hunt for a great yellow rock—ye only rock of size on ye isle. From this rock pace one thousand paces, even, in a proper northerly direction to a circle of smaller yellow rocks. Regardless. In the heart of this circle, dig. Dig deep, my brother, until you strike a stout iron chest. Within ye chest is my personal fortune. Distribute its contents among my rightful heirs. To you personally I unreservedly bequeath that dull and stupid existence you have elected to lead.

From my deathbed—all felicitations!

JOHN VARDEN.

Maracaibo—October ye 14, A^o Di, 1816.

SO deeply was the great-great-grandson of the man who had composed this strange document now immersed in the bold, sprawling, faded words, that he was unaware that the moon was rising, sending a shaft of bright silver through the square screened hole in the eastern wall and upon the table.

The faded black ink seemed to fade

still more, as a scene will fade on the motion picture screen while it is being magically replaced by another, until a tall, slender man with brown cheeks and black eyes and long raven-black hair, with cutlass at waist, drawn flint-lock pistols in hands, was striding upon the cracked and yellowed sheet, as if upon the quarterdeck of a pirate ship.

Captain John Varden! There had been a man! His story had come down reasonably intact from generation to generation, until it had come to Tommy Varden; whispered to him on still summer nights in the last year of his grandfather's life.

A black sheep had Captain John Varden been. Unfitted for marriage, he had, of course, been married unhappily. A few months of the constricting bonds and he was off again to the life that he loved. A sea rover's, a filibuster's life.

In time, a pirate's life:

A pirate chieftain, he had preyed upon merchantmen in the Caribbean and the middle Atlantic, until a stray ball from the long gun in the bow of a British man-o'-war had severed his right leg at the knee. Then had followed the amputation and his death in that odoriferous hole, Maracaibo. He had never known, so the legend ran, that the wife he had deserted had, in due course, borne him a son. Nor, like enough, would he have cared had he known.

It took time—much time—to give Captain John Varden's career a luster. By his brother Ebenezer and by his wife, his black deeds were, if not forgotten, at least ignored. He was a shameful man. His doings were black splotches on the fair escutcheon of the Vardens.

Besides, it was Ebenezer who had

been the family's mainstay; Ebenezer who had labored in counting rooms, investing shrewdly, laying the cornerstone for the great Varden fortune.

Through the generations, it was Ebenezer who was venerated. But as time passed, the picturesqueness of Captain John Varden received a certain attention. Black at heart though he was, he was an adventurer in the days of the greatest adventurers.

It was never recorded, never handed down from father to son, how Ebenezer had taken that letter written on his brother's deathbed. The surprising thing was that he preserved it at all. Captain John Varden was a cruel practical joker; and Ebenezer must have been a man with little daring and less imagination.

Perhaps because of its very picturesqueness, the letter was saved and handed down from father to son until it reached the hands of its present owner.

Doubtless, more than one Varden, in reading this letter, had said: "If the Varden fortune comes to an end in my time, it might be worth while—and a jolly adventure—to ascertain whether or not this treasure was the last of Captain John's practical jokes, or a real treasure."

But the Varden fortune had not come to an end. It had not come to an end until Tommy's profligate, over-trusting and generally foolish father got his slim, artistic hands on it. When that fortune was passed along, in time, to Tommy, there was no fortune at all. Even the cornerstone that Ebenezer had laid was gone.

Fresh from a few of life's bitterest experiences, Tommy had this to face: That he had been brought up to expect millions; that he was utterly un-

trained for any profitable occupation—and that there were no millions.

THE estate was being settled by executors while he lay between life and death in a New York hospital. Upon his discharge he had received the residue. His worldly wealth consisted of the few hundred dollars now in his pocket.

It was upon his discharge from the hospital that Tommy said what other Vardens before him had said: "Maybe there is no treasure. Maybe there never was a treasure. But it's worth looking for. If I find it, I'll have the nucleus for the next Varden fortune."

Now, a man may mix his wishing and his willing; may confuse a fantastic dream with a practical hope. This was what Tommy Varden had done. The more he thought about the treasure, the more he wanted to find it; and the more he wanted to find it, the more certain he became that it was where Captain John Varden, in that sardonic letter, had said he had buried it.

When Ben Tupples had mentioned, on the dock this afternoon, that old man Cable, according to rumor, was living on the proceeds of old buried treasure he had found and was selling piecemeal, Tommy had all but fainted from shock and disappointment. He had since convinced himself that the rumor, like all rumors, was unlikely to be based on fact; he was convinced of what he wanted to believe—that the treasure of Captain John Varden was where that black-hearted old pirate had buried it, undiscovered, untouched—intact!

He said to himself, as he arose from the table and replaced the letter in the wallet and the wallet in his pocket:

"It's here! I'll find it! I know it's here! I've got to find it!"

Then he noticed that the moon was up—a tropical moon, bright enough to read a newspaper by.

He slipped the automatic pistol into his hip pocket, "just in case," and started out to explore his island. During the day, when chance permitted, he had glanced about for "a great yellow rock—ye only rock of size on ye isle," but he had discovered no such rock.

A century and more of strong winds and occasional hurricanes might have obscured the "great yellow rock" with sand. Tommy had anticipated this difficulty. So he set out on the quest of the great yellow rock in the most systematic way. He divided Friendship Key into imaginary zones—tiny geographic areas; and he set about now, exhaustively, to explore these areas.

Less than an hour after he had started his search, he found a rock—a great yellow rock. It was either pure accident, or the purest of fate's designs. Tommy preferred to believe that it was the latter.

In any event, he found, in a thicket of scrub palmetto, the shiny round dome of a great fragment of coquina rock; not yellow any more, but bleached nearly white by the passage of countless scorching suns.

Tommy scooped away the sand at the base of the rock, to make sure that the three feet of it which protruded above the sand was actually the dome of a great rock; and he found that it was.

The deeper he dug, the greater became the rock, until he was certain that it was a veritable boulder—souvenir of some remote geologic epoch.

His heart was beating fast now. He

must not let himself become overconfident. He must discount every possible disappointment. And he checked off the steps he had taken. Certainly, this was "Ye Isle known as Starfish Key."

Certainly, this was a great yellow rock—it must weigh tons. If that letter contained truthful directions, and was not a cruel practical joke, there could be no other rock of its size on the key. Didn't that naturally follow? To Tommy, it did.

THERE remained nothing for him to do now but to pace off one thousand paces "in a proper northerly direction—to a circle of smaller rocks."

Tommy might have waited for morning, but he was too impatient to wait another hour. He had supposed it would take him days, perhaps weeks, to find the great yellow rock described by his great-great-grandfather. His almost instantaneous discovery of that landmark had filled him with excitement.

One thousand paces from this great rock lay the treasure his great-great-grandfather had buried one hundred and thirteen years ago!

He said to himself: "I've got to find it! Oh, I'll find it! I know now that this letter wasn't a practical joke."

The moon blazed down whitely on the still waters of the bay. It silvered the palm fronds. The night, to Tommy Varden, became more romantic than any night he had ever known. More romantic even than the night when he had stood in the white bows of Sylvia Lombard's yacht and kissed her for the first time. The westerly breeze was warm and fresh with romance; sweet and rich with longing.

That breeze came all the way from Mexico.

"One—two—three—four—"

A palm tree. Tommy circled the palm tree.

"Five—six—seven—eight—"

A clump of underbrush cruel with nettles. Tommy circled the underbrush.

"Nine—ten—eleven—twelve—"

His heart was hammering with excitement. He warned himself, even as he counted his paces, that he must be careful. They had told him at the hospital to watch out for his heart. Don't overload it. Give it time to recover from the savage attacks of the pneumonia poisons.

Tommy bade his heart to take it easy. He circled palms, palmettoes, pines. He glanced aloft occasionally to the North Star to correct his bearing. And he bore straight north. Straight to the farthest tip of Friendship Key, where it sloped off into the dangerous flow of Dead Man's Pass.

The treasure would be found—he knew now—in that circle of smaller stones where he had stood with Ben Tupples early this morning. He was sure there had been a circle of small stones there. Or was he sure? His anxiety to find such a circle had perhaps made his imagination a little too helpful.

"Six hundred and ten—six hundred and eleven—"

Tommy stopped with a suddenly sinking heart. Its high hammering went down to leaden, slow thudding.

At the six hundred and twelfth pace the key reached its northernmost extremity. One pace more would have taken Tommy Varden into Dead Man's Pass!



"So!" remarked a biting voice. "A comedian!"

Red Decks

Red McGinty, gunner's mate, thought he was aboard a floating madhouse as the armed freighter Marietta loafed into the sub-infested war zone

By EUGENE CUNNINGHAM

A KNIFE-EDGED December wind lashed Staten Island anchorage. It whipped across the dun-colored water, shaving the tops of the sullen rollers and flinging spindrift in misty clouds, to sheath with gray ice the canopies of steam launches and the sides of motor-sailers, plying between the cruisers Albany and New Orleans and the floats on Staten Island shore.

Red McGinty hunched his shoulders until his head—covered with a blue knitted watch-cap—was well within the upturned collar of his pea coat. He stood on the fo'cas'le of the approaching navy yard tug, his tightly-lashed bag and hammock behind him, with a dozen or more of young bluejackets

huddled about him—all members of the Armed Guard Detail and destined for those cargo boats lying out there beyond the two lean, gray little cruisers.

"The old Queen of the Seas," Red McGinty muttered to himself, between chattering teeth, as he stared at the New Orleans. "She looks as cold—and as homesick for the old Mexican Patrol Squadron—as I am! *Por Dios!* This North Atlantic weather 'll put fur on a man's chest—or daisies on his grave, one!"

The tug passed the little Albany and Red McGinty grinned at her. He was an old "Pacific Sloper," and the Albany had relieved his New Orleans and been relieved by her, times without

number, between Guaymas and Panama. Then the tug's pilot spun his wheel and came close alongside the New Orleans. Red looked over, through the cut-out five-inch sponsons, onto the well-remembered decks. Two years he had been a yeoman aboard her.

"Hey, you big Apple-Knockers!" he abruptly hailed the navigating bridge of the New Orleans as the tug went forward.

The three quartermasters on her bridge straightened, where they were working at the flag-locker. Heinie Hendricks, seamed and brown of face; the lanky, sad, and biting-tongued Ovie Mulkey; Rex Harden, who had been in Red McGinty's draft to the cruiser, more than two years past, off Goat Island.

"Red McGinty!" they roared. "Where the hell d' you think you're goin', in that spitkid?"

Red gave them the Shanghai Gesture, very affectionately. Many and many a liberty had he made with them.

"Changed my rate to gunner's mate!" he informed them. "Going to the freighter Marietta—in your convoy, judging from that deckload of black diamonds you're carrying. You have to have somebody to take care of you, you know, out there among the tin fish. See you in Queenstown! First bar to the right and I'll buy the drinks!"

"The Marietta!" cried Heinie Hendricks, staring hard, as the tug plowed past. "Marietta? You're a blowed-up sucker! Never did have any luck an' you're gettin' no better fast. Why, she's the champion—Yates—"

BUT the tug was by, now; and the wind caught Heinie's words so that Red, frowning, cupped hand at ear, could make out no more. Came interruption, from a dropped window

of the pilot-house, in which was framed a red and irascible face crowned by a chief petty officer's cap.

"Pipe down that racket, y' bloody Preserve Prize!" the pilot bellowed. "What d' y' think y're on, anyhow? Coney Island excursion boat, mebbe? Or the Old Fall River Line?"

The tug was now among the gathering merchantmen of the convoy. She swung under a freighter's stern and Red McGinty, looking up mechanically, saw in dingy block letters upon the rust-streaked mirror the single word *Marietta*.

He looked with very real interest at his ship, as the tug came about on a starboard helm and ran neatly along a black side that was streaked with rust and salt and splattered with ice. The tug backed her engines, and rose and fell gently beside the freighter.

A seaman on the tug's fo'cas'le jerked his arm. A heaving-line rose snakily in the air and was caught by an unseen sailor on the *Marietta*. The bow-line was dragged aboard the cargo boat. Spring and stern lines followed. There was a creaking and a whining of a winch above Red McGinty's head, behind the *Marietta's* bulwark. A cargo boom came swinging out over the tug, with a cargo-net dangling from the whip.

"A' right, y' rubber boots!" the tug pilot roared. "Git them bags an' hammicks into the cargo-net! Shake a leg, will y'! Got on divin' shoes, mebbe? Want that the war should be over before y' land on that mud-scow!"

They stowed their dunnage in the net, Red McGinty and the three others—recruits all—of the *Marietta* draft. At Red's grunted command, they caught hold of the net's meshes as the winch whined and the whip began to lift.

"Y' big boot with the mouth!" the pilot sent a final shot at Red. "Y' don't know how lucky y' are to—"

"Boot?" drawled Red, interrupting. "Why, you blame' militiaman, I'm lucky you could find your way out here, without having Josephus Daniels to lead you by the ear! Where you'd steal that uniform? Or did you buy it from a hock-shop? I've seen better imitations of sailors than you, made out of what you could find in the boson's locker! And what d' you mean, anyhow, talking to a man with service in? Put yourself on report when you get back!"

RED dropped to the Marietta's cluttered fo'cas'le, while the pilot danced a furious jig in his house and bellowed wordlessly, and his crew hauled in their lines again. There was a spud most providentially beside Red's foot. A large and a ripe and a lovely spud. Red picked it up and tossed it deftly, underhanded. It smacked upon the window-frame in which the pilot's murderous red face was centered. It splattered gorgeously over the enraged features. Red turned away with a gentle sigh of purest contentment.

"So!" a cold and biting voice remarked, just abaft him. "A comedian! Well, well, well! And it's come aboard the Marietta to cheer us all up with its little jokes. All is well and we can put to sea, Josephus!"

Red turned slowly. It was a slim chief boatswain's mate, with the grimest dark face and narrowed, cold black eyes that Red could, offhand, remember seeing. The gashmouth was twisted a little, in a sneer. Red shrugged angrily. This wasn't the sort of chief he had expected to find.

"You in charge of the Armed Guard?" he inquired.

"I'm Yates, very much in charge," the chief nodded. "And you're the lad who's ambitious to wear the gold. Well, I'm a frank and honest person; I'll tell you right here and now that you've made a sweet start, aboard the Marietta. Insolence to a chief petty officer; smart aleckisms. Get that bag and hammock down into the new deck-house in the well-deck. That's Armed Guard quarters. Then fall in by your gun, here. I'll muster you all at stations."

"My — gra'ma's — old — pink — bustle!" Red McGinty said dazedly to himself, as he trailed the rest of the draft to the deckhouse. "All that over one little bitty spud. What d' you reckon Lord Yates'd have said, if it'd been a fine, large, last month's tomato! And who the devil could have told him about my craving to belt on a cheese-knife? Of course, I was recommended by letter, but how would he have cast those sour optics of his upon that recommendation of Captain Orville's?"

He shrugged fatalistically. Your navy-man of any service has learned to make the best of any situation. It was not the first time that Red McGinty had bucked superiors who looked upon him without favor. There had been McClure, and the time when the Queen of the Seas, otherwise known as the New Orleans, had borne upon her white side one morning the red-leaded sign: "McClure's Madhouse."

"Hell of a note, though," Red told himself. "My dear Cousin Willy would certainly be pleased to see us now. He and his bright and shining-new ensign's stripe, graduated from Annapolis a year ahead of time and all. And sending his picture back to the Centerton Gazette, so that all hands and the cook can see it. Especially Wilma Taylor. Oh, most especially for Wil-

ma's benefit—damn Willy's virtuous little flyspeck of a soul! Shows what Cousin Willy's branch of the family can do, and how his Uncle Patrick's boy, Red, who was so wild and ran away to ship in the navy, doesn't measure up—"

He slammed his bag and hammock in a vacant bunk and turned back without even looking around at his quarters. For, folded small in his leg-purse was a letter of Wilma Taylor's. That clipped newspaper picture of Cousin Willy, very stiff in new ensign's uniform, seemed somehow to have got into it. Ensign William McGinty had written her that he was now ready to win the war; the German navy would venture out of harbor at its own peril.

RED fell in beside the fo'cas'le three-inch. He looked at the others there; decided that nobody drew much water. He, a first-class gunner's mate, with but three months remaining of his four years' enlistment period, certainly was the senior man. And, since he was figured as one of the crew, he would become gun-captain as a matter of form.

"What's my station, chief?" he inquired courteously of Yates. "Gun-captain?"

"Hardly!" Yates said dryly, voice seeming to drip ice water. "You'll show me that you know a tompion from a breech-block, before you draw a responsible position. Sight-setter will do you nicely for a year or two. A ping-pong turned gunner's mate. Well, well, well! The navy does change in time of war, no disputing that! But you can try struggling with the sights for a time. And if you should be overhauled by the Chief of Bureau, insisting that you accept a sword, think of the jump you'd make! 'From Sight-

setter to Future Admiral'—sounds like a title from an Alger book! A big jump—if you should happen to make it."

"Well, anyway"—Red looked sweetly straight ahead and made his random shot—"I haven't been turned down for a commission. As a matter of fact, *I've* been recommended for examination."

The way Yates's sallow face flushed and his thin mouth tightened told Red that his shot had gone home. Mr. Yates, without doubt, had fallen down on an exam.

Twilight. Gray sea, gray sky, were welded in one vast and empty-seeming haze. Red stood grimly by his sight, for the convoy was drawing into long, widely-spaced columns. Somewhere ahead, the New Orleans was leading her charges much as a mother hen leads her chicks; or more appropriately, as a sharp-fanged shepherd dog leads and guards a flock of sheep. But these sheep of the sea had grown wartime fangs of a sort; most of them carried naval gun-crews to man twelve-pounders or three-inch.

He was very much peeved, was McGinty, Patrick, gunner's mate, first-class. For the kids of the gun-crew eyed him in the deckhouse with covert grins. The boy cox'n who was serving as gun-captain was all swelled up at having a first-class serve under him, who was but a third-class petty officer.

In the strictest sense of the regulations, Red's assignment was not according to Hoyle. A gunner's mate is a skilled mechanic; he keeps the guns in shape for the gun-crews. Red's post should have been as assistant to Yates and supervisor of the two Marietta guns. He had no real place in a crew, even as captain. Red had a grievance, but he knew better than to air it, in

time of war! "Growl you may, but do it you must!" is the navy motto.

A MAN materialized beside him so suddenly that Red jerked about with a grunt. It was a figure of much the same size as Yates's, with a heavy overcoat almost to the ankles, and turned up, of collar, to the top of the cap. Red thought it was Yates for a moment, on the darkening fo'cas'le. Then the man leaned forward and looked at him.

"You're the new man on this gun, aren't you?" he said in a low, confidential voice. "I'm Bronson, the Marietta's owner. I sail with my ship. Do you know much about pirates?"

"Huh?" Red grunted, amazed at such a question in such a place. "Pirates?"

"Did you ever hear of Major Stede Bonnet, who worked with Blackbeard? Hanged at Charles Town, December 18, 1718?"

"Ye-es, I seem to recall a little about him. Why do you ask, Mr. Bronson?"

"Oh, I have my reasons!" Bronson whispered and giggled oddly. "I'm glad you know of him. I like to have men aboard the Marietta who know something about those bold old boys. I—I have to go, now. But I'll talk to you, later. Yes, yes! I'll certainly talk more with you."

He was gone like a flash. Red grunted wordlessly and rubbed his square chin. His blue eyes were narrowed in something like bewilderment as he stared after the owner.

"On your toes!" Yates growled in his ear at this moment. "You're not in the Pelham Bay Navy now, you know!"

"But a madhouse by any other name would be as mad," Red drawled. He was chafing under this seemingly sys-

tematic rawhiding by his chief. As much as he wanted a chance at a commission; as grimly as he had resolved to get one, to counterbalance that of Ensign William McGinty—now on the New Orleans, of all ships!—Red was getting close to the ragged edge of snapping. His temper had never been over-long.

"Stow that gab! You keep a stopper on your jaw-tackle, my would-be mustang, while you're aboard the Marietta."

What would have been a bitter exchange of compliments was suddenly interrupted. Darkness had come over the sea. It was lights-out for all vessels in the convoy. Now a light twinkled, somewhere ahead of the Marietta, in the column to starboard of her. It was an incident comparable to a lighted cigarette in a powder-magazine.

"If I know my old skipper," Red grunted dreamily, "hell will be popping just chop-chop!"

And in what seemed a twinkling, a ghostly gray shape came darting back through the lane between columns of the convoy and ran alongside that careless freighter. There was a half-roar, half-snarl, from the New Orleans's bridge. When the cruiser had wheeled and returned to the head of the convoy, the light was gone. So was Yates, when Red turned grimly to look for him.

IN the days that followed, Yates's manner changed not at all toward Red McGinty. His cold dislike of the gunner's mate seemed rather to crystallize. Never a watch passed, but Yates appeared silently to make some remark concerning yeomen who wanted to be gunner's mates, who wanted even to be line officers. A dozen times, Red's furious temper, battened down

too long, now, was on the verge of an explosion.

He knew that a row with the chief meant kissing his examination a last good-by. He knew, too, that it was only a matter of time until that farewell was made. But for six days, he managed somehow to avoid the explosion.

A half dozen times he was buttonholed about the decks, when he was off watch, by the owner, Bronson. He found the owner a slender, but muscular man of early forties.

His interest in pirates Bronson explained by saying that he had discovered himself a descendant of that Stede Bonnet who had been a colonial planter and an honored soldier, but had craved excitement and fighting and had purchased a ship which he had made into a pirate craft. But Red told himself that it was queer business to come snooping around as Bronson had done that first night, asking a new hand if he knew about pirates. Somehow Red couldn't assign Major Bonnet that much importance.

The Marietta's skipper, Captain Troop, was an old, old man; Red thought he was eighty, if a day. An old Yankee ex-whaler, out of New Bedford, who never said a useless word. He had a Bible on the bridge with him, and his orders to the crew and the mates were interlarded with texts from the Old Testament. He looked like an old patriarch. But he seemed a good sailor, and Bronson appeared to pay little or no attention to him; certainly he never presumed to interfere.

Day by day, night by night, as they neared the Irish coast, the Marietta lagged behind; place by place in the convoy column she went back, until at dawn of the ninth day out Red came

out of the deck house to find the ship bringing up the rear of the column—and with more than designated interval between her blunt and rusty bow and the stern of the vessel preceding. Yates was walking the fo'cas'le, shooting little frowning glances up at the bridge.

"Mr. Evans!" Captain Troop was yelling down the engine room voice-tube. "Mr. Evans! Standard speed is ten knots. We're falling behind. What's wrong below? Can't you keep up steam?"

Then he shook his gray head angrily. "Excuses! Excuses! That's all I have out of the engineers' mouths. Last voyage and this voyage again. Man an' boy, sixty years an' more have I been to sea, but this is the first time ever I dirtied my hands with steam—an' now look at us!"

BACK came the New Orleans, with a bone in her teeth. The captain himself was on her bridge, and a speaking trumpet was ominously in his big hands. He scowled and clapped the trumpet to his mouth.

"Marietta ahoy!" he roared. "If you don't mind letting me in on this secret, just what is ailing that coffee pot? Day after day, I've had to look farther astern for you! Now, are you going to keep up standard speed, or do you wish me officially to consider you as leaving the convoy?"

"It's the engineers, cap'n!" old Troop said sourly. "I just don't know what to tell ye! I've given Evans my orders to keep up the speed, but we just don't seem able to do it! An' I understood we had good engines, too."

"Hmph!" remarked the New Orleans's skipper. "Well, I've twenty-six other ships to escort. I can't be wet-nursing yours. If you can keep up,

shake a leg. If you can't, you'll have to proceed alone and take your chances. I can't imperil twenty-six ships for the sake of one. This is war-time, and we're right in the sub zone. You did this same thing last time over, when the Chattanooga escorted you. Didn't show up in Brest until three days after the convoy arrived. And the Chattanooga, returning, sighted you well off your proper course, bargaining all over the Atlantic! So take your choice: keep up or fall out!"

A low chuckle sounded at Red's elbow. He turned, to face the owner, Bronson. Bronson's pale eyes were like sunlit steel. He grinned at Red:

"That navy skipper isn't pleased with us. But I've been below, and Evans tells me that he's going to have to stop the engines to make some minor adjustments. Captain Troop won't like that a little bit."

That dark, inscrutable little Welshman, the Marietta's chief engineer, now appeared aft in the well-deck. He came forward and climbed the fo'cas'le ladder, then to the bridge. Old Troop's disgusted roar confirmed Bronson's guess. The skipper seemed anything but pleased.

Yates appeared at the head of the fo'cas'le ladder, at the foot of which Red and Bronson were standing. He stopped at the bottom and regarded Red with cold displeasure.

"Up to the gun with you! With the ship helpless, we'll be a lovely target for a tin fish. Keep your eyes peeled, too! You stand by to work those sights properly if—"

"THAT 'LL do from you!" Red McGinty said in a slow, thickened voice. Figuratively, mentally, he took his hope of promotion in his hand and tossed it overboard. But

it wasn't worth it, he told himself flashingly. There was a limit to what he would take from any man, in hope of gaining anything. He was past that limit now.

"That 'll be—just—all!" he told Yates, ramming his furious face into the chief's. "I've forgotten more about ordnance and gunnery than you could learn if you owned a correspondence school. I've listened to your petty raw-hiding just all I intend to! You've tried to make a fool of me before that bunch of recruits; you've puffed up a kid cox'n by making him gun captain and trying to make those New Shoers believe that I was capable of nothing more than sight-setting. But you're done. Finished!"

"Pipe down! I'll have you in the New Orleans's brig."

"There's your signal halyards! Go hoist the police flag! The New Orleans knows me—it was the skipper there who rated me gunner's mate, after giving me the stiffest exams, he said, that he'd ever given a candidate. He said that it was a warrant gunner's exam. Now, you go tell him that you've been putting me sight-setter on that pop-gun; and insinuating that you know more about guns than I do! Go on—signal him. Tell him what I've told you. Cut loose, feller."

"Teacher's pet, are you?" Yates said unpleasantly. "On second thought, then, I'll just wait a bit. We'll be in Queenstown very shortly. I'll have a few words to say then. Meanwhile, you'll obey orders—ears back with a snap, too—or take the consequences. Chew on that!"

"And you chew on this: I have a little service in. I know my stuff, plus some things you don't know, or you wouldn't have flunked your exams. You can give me orders in the line of

duty; that's all right—it's the Blue Book. But don't be salting 'em with nasty little side-remarks. For some reason or other, you decided to raw-hide me the minute I stepped aboard this barge. You made up your mind you didn't like the cut of my jib. I consider it a compliment. But you, or any one else on top this bunch of water, can go just so far. And you're there! You chew on that!"

"Meanwhile"—it was Bronson, but a Bronson Red had never seen, a fierce-eyed, grim-mouthed man, who looked every inch the battler—"may I suggest, Mr. Yates, that, interesting as these points of naval etiquette may be, they're a bit out of place? We're derelict, for the moment. As you remarked awhile ago, we're a lovely target for the tin fish. Take Chief Engineer Evans, down below; he lost his beloved brother when the U-boat torpedoed the Britannia. I think he's gone through enough, without worrying him now. So let's get in fighting shape."

YATES moved a shoulder angrily and went aft. Bronson looked after him, and a corner of his tight mouth twitched.

"He's all right; a fighting man," the owner said, as if thinking aloud. "But he knows his limitations, and he knows he's senior, for the moment, to a man who's destined to be his senior, given any luck. Naturally, Yates having the temperament he does, he's furious. Petty, but human."

Then Bronson whirled, grinning tightly. "I hope a damned tin fish does come up and try to slam us! No such luck last trip. There we lay, rolling beam-ends under—and the sea as empty of subs as heaven is of usurers. Perhaps there'll be better hunting this time."

Bronson looked out across the gray water, muttering under his breath. His excitement seemed to wax; his strong-fingered hand held a stubby brier pipe. It cracked; cracked again; dropped in pieces on the deck. Red stared at him; the Marietta's owner seemed quite normal in some respects, but this strange yearning for a battle with a sub at what would inevitably be stiff odds—it was peculiar, at least.

The fo'cas'le gun-crew came running forward along the well-deck. Red ran up the ladder ahead of them. He looked to port and starboard; looked ahead and looked astern. The convoy was vanished. They lay rolling gently on a gray sea that was empty of all life but skimming gulls, and themselves.

The youthful cox'n who was captain of the fo'cas'le gun looked around anxiously. He met Red McGinty's grimly amused eyes, and flushed. He looked as if he were about to say something, but Red lifted his hand and leaned a little forward.

"Don't!" was all Red said; but so vicious was the tone that he needed to say no more. The cox'n looked hastily away.

Time dragged. Hours passed. Then, "Periscope!" came a long, wailing cry from the masthead lookout's half-barrel. "Broad on—the starb'd beam!"

Yates's voice sounded in tense, but calm, hail from the bridge. Red McGinty credited him with that calmness. "Stand by, gun-crews! I'll give you a range soon."

Red waited, twiddling with his sight. He could not see that periscope the lookout had reported, which was doubtless plain to Yates and the officers on the bridge. At an angry howl from the bridge he looked up, then aft.

The American ensign had come down from the gaff of the mainmast. As Red frowned, it, rose again, but capsized in a distress signal. Like acknowledgment of the maneuver, a dull roar came from the sea on the star-board beam.

Then followed a terrific crash. The poop deck seemed to lift bodily a foot, then settled at an insane angle. The crew of the poop-gun yelled. Red saw them through the tangle of rigging between. Their gun was out of commission now.

"Stand by, the fo'cas'le gun!" Yates bellowed grimly. "The fighting's all yours. We'll take a chance. Range—"

BRONSON appeared, running like a greyhound along the well-deck.

He bounced up the ladders. Red saw his head and shoulders over the bridge-curtain, arguing fiercely with Yates. Old Troop was not in sight; doubtless, gone below to inspect the damage done his ship. Yates shook his head impatiently. Bronson gesticulated furiously. Yates pushed him off impatiently, angrily. A second shot roared from the sub. The shell came zooming over the fo'cas'le, and the gun-crew flinched. All but Red McGinty; he was staring upward.

Something had moved in his mind. An idea, but hardly a clear-cut idea. Merely the hazy beginning of a theory. He saw Yates rush away from Bronson; guessed that the bridge was empty but for these two and the helmsman. If his idea was even half correct—

"You take this sight-setting!" Red snarled at the cox'n, who was fiddling with the breech-block lever. "We'll get along without a captain for a minute! If you shirk the job, may the Lord help you, for I won't!"

Red jerked the youngster around the pointer, to the sight. Then he raced aft, to the bridge ladder; went up it in two great bounds. Bronson had Yates by the shoulder, and, struggle as he might, the chief could not get free of that grip.

"I tell you, don't fire yet!" Bronson was screaming. "This is my ship. I'll give the orders—fight the battle. What else did I stage this for? You'll obey or—"

"Let go!" Yates snarled. "Let go, you crazy fool! She'll sink us!"

"She won't! She'll come up in range! You don't know who I am! I'm Stede Bonnet reincarnated. I'm going to get every U-boat that sails the sea! I bought this ship for that! Evans and I know the way to do it! We'll sink 'em all. We'll toll 'em into range! We'll play cripple! We'll—"

He let go of Yates and flung up his arms in a great triumphant gesture. His lips moved frantically, but produced no words—mere gibbering. Yates whirled back to lift his binoculars toward the oncreeping sub. Then Bronson jerked a pistol from his pocket. He sprang in like a great cat jumping, and smashed the chief over the skull.

Yates slumped to the bridge floor. Bronson aimed the pistol deliberately at the prone figure. He was yammering to himself about mutineers—Stede Bonnet's way.

Red McGinty moved only a little more slowly than had the maniac. His palm-edge chopped down in a jujutsu blow on Bronson's gun arm. The pistol roared, but the bullet went harmlessly through the bridge-curtain. Red stepped back one pace, then in again, and his hard right fist smashed home under Bronson's ear. It might have been enough, but Red was taking no

chances. He chopped at the sagging figure with terrific rights and lefts, lifting Bronson clear off of his feet with a final tremendous uppercut.

Bronson went out the ladder-opening and his body arched in the air. He fell to the well-deck ladder-head and slid limply down it, to lie still. Red wasted no time in looking at him.

"GIVE her the gun, Evans!" he roared down the engine room voice-tube. "All she's got!"

His fingers fastened like steel hooks upon the shoulder of the thick-headed sailor at the wheel.

"Starb'd your helm! Over with her. She'll have steerage-way in a minute."

Another shell from the sub. It carried away the gun-crew's deck house in a splintering crash. But Red's guess had been correct; the freighter's hull was quivering now, with the surge of those powerful engines which had never been fully unleashed, despite the commands of old Captain Troop. In what seemed incredibly brief time the Marietta answered her helm. Around she came, gaining speed with the churning of her screw.

"Steer straight for that sub!" Red snarled in the helmsman's ear. "We'll try two thousand yards!" he snapped. "On the job, you sight-setters. Ready? Good enough! Stand by, all hands! Ah!"

The shell danced across the water somewhat to the left of the U-boat. She was getting closer, and she let go her own fo'cas'le gun. But the Marietta, racing straight at her, was a poor target. Theirs was a cleaner miss than Red had scored. At fifteen hundred yards Red worked his wheel flashingly, getting her on the crosswires. She hung there for a moment; Red shook his head; he barked to the

sight-setters his guess at range and deflection; spun his wheel again. The trainer grunted: "Mark!" Red pressed the electric firing button. No explosion.

He cursed under his breath. "Damn these makeshift circuits! Ready to fire by percussion! Steady on it? Fire!"

At a guess, he thought that his shell must have struck the German somewhere around the nose and plowed straight aft; for he seemed to glimpse a halving of the sub. Couldn't be certain, in that flashing instant of disintegration. Nor did it particularly matter; for Admiral von Tirpitz could chalk off one more of his tin fish which would never return to port.

Straight at the place where oil was spreading out to smooth and film the sea the Marietta plowed on.

As Red looked over side at the wreckage that showed for a little while ahead, a blood-smeared and reeling figure came up to the gun. It was Yates—and he seemed not to know what had happened. Red turned upon him.

"WHO hit me?" Yates snarled. "Bronson?"

"Yep, Bronson. He's crazy as a bedbug in a folding bed! Thinks he's the old pirate, Stede Bonnet, come back to earth. Don't you remember all his raving? He and Evans framed that break-down, just to get away from the convoy and go fishing—tin-fishing. Wouldn't be surprised if Evans is kissed a little, too—he lost a brother to the U-boats.

"Bronson wanted to look helpless—to bring the sub up close. Then he was going to order full speed ahead, I guess, and—I don't know! Maybe he figured he was a Roman admiral, or something, as well as Stede Bonnet. Maybe he planned to ram the tin fish.

But you worried him, Yates; so he was going to drill you full of nice little holes."

Yates stared at him.

"But he hit me over the head with his gun, didn't he? You mean he was going to shoot me after I fell? Then who stopped him? Where's he now?"

"He was decorating the foot of the well-deck ladder when I last had leisure to observe him," Red said airily. "You see, I figured that his shooting you might interfere with some plan you had, so I—dissuaded him, as the bookionary says so aptly. Humm. Nobody in the water—alive, anyway."

"Well—" Yates paused awkwardly, then shrugged. "I owe you for that, McGinty. I never thought I'd feel like thanking you for anything, but—if you're willing to let bygones be bygones—you can afford to. You sank that Heinie on your own—and there comes the New Orleans, hell-bent!"

Somewhat later, in the familiar cabin of the "Queen of the Seas," Yates and old Troop—who also had a bandaged head—and Red McGinty sat at the cabin table, before the big figure of the New Orleans's skipper.

Yates had told his tale curtly, giving to Red McGinty precisely the credit that was due him. The grizzled skipper nodded thoughtfully:

"Very good, indeed. You did well, Yates. I know that you're disappointed in being knocked out at the beginning of the fighting; but the fortunes of war aren't always kind. Better luck to you next time. And better luck next time you buck the board at Brooklyn Yard. Perhaps the admiral can help you there. Well, McGinty! Ever since you reported aboard here, two and a half years ago, thrills and excitement have

chased you, *no es verdad?* I'm going to write a special letter in your case. What is it, orderly?"

"**E**NSIGN MCGINTY, sir. He reports that he has photographed the Marietta, as you ordered."

"Come in, Mr. McGinty," the captain called.

A smallish ensign, white-haired and sandy-browed, entered briskly. He kept his eyes straight front while he reported. The captain said:

"I thought that picture might be good for the recruiting service. Where do you come from, McGinty? I seem to have heard, but—"

"Centerton, sir," replied Ensign McGinty.

"If we can talk the recruiting service and the Office of Naval Intelligence into agreement, we might—What's the name of the Centerton paper?"

"Centerton *Gazette*, sir!" Again the two voices came in chorus; again they looked steadily at each other and away.

"*Gazette*. Yes, I seem to have heard that. Well, it would be rather a nice thing if we could supply the *Gazette* with a print of the picture and a bit of a write-up, wouldn't it, don't you think?"

"Yes, sir!"

But it was only McGinty, gunner's mate, first-class, who spoke this time. Ensign McGinty stared stonily ahead.

"I think it would," the captain nodded. "I'll do my best to arrange it. It will—ah—give the girls a treat."

"Thank you, sir!"

And again it was only McGinty, gunner's mate, first-class, who spoke. Ensign McGinty seemed to think of nothing, at the moment, for which he wished to thank his commanding officer.

THE END.



Hey, Rube!

Two circuses cannot thrive on the same route at the same time—and Jack Horton's unscrupulous rivals were determined to wreck his show by the swiftest methods

By JOHN WILSTACH

Author of "Circus Blood," "The Emergency Man," etc.

Novelette—Complete

CHAPTER I.

ULTIMATUM.

THE winter quarters of the Horton Circus were located on a ten-acre stretch of ground a mile beyond Carlingtown. Smoke drifted from a dozen chimneys, above barrack-like frame structures, unpainted and weather-beaten. Dominating all was a big storage warehouse, dwarfing a shanty beside it which served as show headquarters.

It was a cold, blustering afternoon in early March. A stranger parked his car near the location and entered the unfenced layout. He strolled about, openly observant, on a tour of investi-

gation, with the quiet assurance of an individual not accustomed to be balked in his undertakings.

The man peered through one window and saw a group of women engaged in patching old uniforms and trappings for the parade and performance. Passing another building, from which issued the sounds of a blacksmith shop, he found that carpenters and painters were repairing and brightening the rolling stock, getting the heavy wagons in shape for the start of the season.

The double doors to the menagerie were open. The visitor stood for several minutes watching a trainer start to break in a new wild animal act.

Lions were attached to the bars of a circular cage by big leather collars, and their keeper was getting them accustomed to his presence by edging closer and closer, lashing them as they



growled and snarled in an exhausting effort to get at him. After the beasts were thoroughly mastered they would be handled without chains.

In a fourth building, circus riders who had reported ahead of time, were breaking in younger members of the family into their act.

From the center of the dirt ring projected wooden spokes of the "meca-nique," like those of a wheel without a rim. A leather belt encircled the waist of each beginner, to which a rope was tied; its other end was fastened to the swinging arm. The rider could fall, but instead of landing on the earth was suspended in air. The horse could be placed under him again, and during his lesson he could be thrown without a possibility of injury.

"A good outfit," murmured the ob-

server, "and thrifty—no throwing away of money."

WANDERING about the grounds he finished his tour in front of show headquarters, knocking sharply at the front door.

"Come in," ordered a lusty voice, and the man entered a big room overheated by an old-fashioned stove.

The occupant of the office, Jack Horton, removed his feet from the desk and arose to greet his visitor, though unknown to him.

"Stay comfortable," said the newcomer. "This is a business call, but it needn't be formal."

Jack glanced at the other curiously, noticing the deep lines from nose to mouth of a hard, wind-and-sun-tanned face, and eyes that were gray and expressionless. The visitor had the sure, balanced bearing of a big executive of the ruthless type.

"Who do you represent, sir?"

"The Estang Brothers Circus Association. I am Frank Crowley, general manager."

Young Horton stiffened, but determined to be courteous, no matter how painful.

"Be seated, Mr. Crowley," he said thinly. "We kind of imagined we'd get a call, since you started winterin' in Godfry, not ten miles away."

Crowley lounged into a chair facing the desk.

"I assume you represent your father, Mr. Horton?"

"More or less. The old man's a bit off his feed with a cold. Do you desire to see him for anything?"

"No, you'll do. Mr. Horton, I'm going to be frank, brutally frank. Fact is, Estang Brothers have decided to take in your regular territory this season."

"Jump our territory, eh? Well, we've been building up a good name for onto thirty years."

"Mebbe," drawled Mr. Crowley, "but the point is that there isn't room enough for more than *one* show in this neck of the woods."

"I bite. Where does that leave yours?"

The visitor flushed under his tan. "I'm getting to that. My principals do not want the expense and trouble of fighting opposition—the process of putting you definitely out of business. We have the money behind us, so there is no doubt whatever of your ultimate finish. But modern business methods are deemed best by us, if they work; and I am prepared to give you a chance for a good out. You are to be given an opportunity to merge with Estang Brothers. In other words, they'll take your show over and—"

"Drop the Horton name completely after a couple of seasons. As you seem to take all this so very much for granted, perhaps you might as well tell me how much we are offered to become dead doggies?"

FORTY thousand dollars for your name and trade-mark, animal acts and equipment. We don't want your regular menagerie or your cars."

Crowley's words were curtly spoken, more like the delivery of a ultimatum than a proposal.

Jack Horton tipped his chair back and laughed heartily.

The rival general manager did not smile. Instead, his lips met in a hard line.

"I told Dan Estang," he said shortly, "that you wouldn't listen to reason. But if you do fight, you'll be crawling in the dirt to us, begging for

a sale, before long. Did it ever occur to you to figure out what happened to our previous opposition? Where's the Langley Show, the Greater Hunter, the John Pelton Dog and Pony? All



out of commission; dead mutton. Better think this over, young Horton. Forty thousand is better than going on the rocks. You can't buck us — and our methods."

The last meaningly.

"Oh, I've heard of your underhand ways," said Jack sneeringly. "You represent a hoggish outfit that wants to live by killing off all fair competition. Well, run back and tell Dan Estang that I won't even put this up to the old man. Equipment be darned. Our name, built up to where it is by three generations of showmen, belongs to us; and it is not for sale to a bunch of sure-thing artists."

"That's the message I'm to take back?" Crowley arose, drawing on buckskin gloves.

"It is. And I admire your nerve, coming here with such a proposition."

"You don't realize you're throwing away your only chance to get out while

the getting is good. Don't slink around when you're stranded high and dry and expect this generous offer to be repeated."

Horton jumped from his seat at the desk with surprising agility for such a heavy man. He took three steps to the door and opened it for his unwelcome caller.

"I don't threaten worth a hang, Mr. Crowley, and I think you had better leave. My patience is wearing thin."

His tone was dangerous. The other merely shrugged his shoulders.

"It's a waste of time talking with a fool," he said blandly. "You must be shown, a bit bluntly. If the going gets rough, remember you were asking for it."

The door slammed behind him.

"The odd thing," murmured Jack Horton, to himself, "is that I believe that bird means exactly what he says. Bet his veins have ice water for circulation instead of blood. Ain't there always some one tryin' to take the joy out of life?"

CHAPTER II.

ON THE DESERTED LOT.

AT five o'clock Jack shoved into the upper drawer of his desk the papers he had been perusing. They were connected with a matter of major importance—the coming season's route of the big show. The towns had been mostly sewed up by the contracting agent. Many things entered into consideration; the circus aimed to play where conditions were good, with no disasters to crops, in towns whose topographical situation was studied closely, with a particular aim to hit points that were natural junctions.

A play date might be a village of

only fifteen hundred population, but if one ran a circle twenty miles about it, the drawing call might be one hundred thousand. Character and price of license entered in, the wet and dry season, and the condition of soil in case of rain. Also the position of railroad yards and show lots.

Jack put these reports away with a smile of pleasure. Starting the second of April, the circus that bore his name played, to his mind, a continuous line of good spots.

Why should they fear the Estang Brothers Circus Association? What if that outfit had, by foul means, killed other shows? The Horton Circus was a fighting aggregation.

He locked the shack and strolled to his sedan, parked in the roadway. Jumping in, he drove quickly to the new Horton home. There he related to his father the high points of the interview with Estang's general manager.

"I should have consulted you, dad," concluded Jack, in a tone of apology, "but I was so blamed mad! I knew you'd be insulted at the very thought of selling out for a paltry forty thousand."

"You did quite right, my boy," returned the grizzled circus veteran. "I'm only sorry we shot so much of the family bank roll building this house last year. With the rainy spell that hung on so, we were lucky to break even on the season."

"Why worry? After all, our show gives satisfaction, and our name's good as gold through our country."

"Sure, lad. I only wish I thought this was all a bluff. Did you bring that route material home with you?"

"No, I left the papers in my desk."

"Well, I guess they'll be safe enough there. But carry 'em with you

to-morrow. I've known Dan Estang by reputation for twenty years, and he's low enough to wiggle under a snake. Our route would be quite a weapon, in his hands."

"I'll go right back to the shack, now."

"No, dinner's almost ready. I don't think they're as fast workers as all that."

"What do you really expect, dad?"

"I hardly know, we've never had hard opposition. The big shows have played the East, South, or West, leaving us alone up here in Michigan, Minnesota, Iowa, Nebraska and the Dakotas."

"Fair competition won't injure us. Only," he shook his head, "I heard of the tough deal that was handed the Langley Show. But we'll wait for trouble, boy, not look for it."

ALL during dinner Jack Horton had a vague misgiving. Out at winter quarters there was a watchman, to cover fire insurance, an ancient pensioner named Ned Hawkins, but he'd most likely be found by a stove warming his old bones. It was strange to feel, suddenly, on the defensive, here in a country where father and son had ruled a little world under canvas with none to say them nay.

After the meal was over Jack went to his room and secured a service revolver.

He decided to stop and secure those papers on the way home, and warn Ned Hawkins to patrol the grounds carefully.

Jack had an engagement to take his girl to a new picture, and he wouldn't have missed keeping it for the world. But he deposited her at her home before ten-thirty and declined the usual

invitation to come inside for a few minutes.

A fifteen minute ride and he was in front of the Horton winter quarters, where he left the machine. The moon came from behind a cloud and drenched the lonely-looking buildings with silver light.

First off, he must find Ned Hawkins.

Young Horton strolled about the grounds looking for his night watchman. He walked from building to building, knocking on doors and speaking the old man's name, his voice echoing loudly, to him, in the stillness of the night. Ned must be taking a nap somewhere, and sleeping like a log.

After all, his particular objective in stopping off was to secure the papers relative to the season's route. He would give Ned a good dressing-down in the morning. Perhaps he had better hire a couple of the husky roustabouts, who loafed in town between seasons, to come out from now on and stand guard.

Jack made his way to the headquarters shack, letting himself in with his key.

The place wasn't wired for electricity, being seldom used at night. There was, however, a kerosene lamp on a table near his desk.

He scratched a match and by its feeble flame started toward the direction of the lamp. Instantly a little puff of wind blew the light out. The moon must have retreated behind a cloud, for the room was dark as the bottom of a well.

Drawing a box of matches from his pocket he cupped his hands to find his way by one. That strange breeze extinguished it instantly. Jack was frankly puzzled. When he had left, late in the afternoon, the windows had been

locked, as well as the back entrance. Entering, he had just slammed the door behind him. From where, he wondered, in bewilderment, came that treacherous current of air?

Standing stock-still in the darkness he could hear nothing save his own uneven breathing. Yet he felt, with that peculiar sixth sense—or thought that he felt—the presence of another person there in that one-room shack. Now, of course, listening with nervous intensity, he could hear the creaking of the windows and the noise of the wind against the tar-paper roofing. Nothing else. He must be suffering from a too vivid imagination.

In a room that he knew so well, he should have perfect orientation. Jack groped his way from chair to chair, toward his desk. His sense of direction was true. He nearly stumbled over the swivel chair, but managed to slouch into it, and reach hastily for the drawer containing the route sheet and papers connected with it, clipped together.

As he pulled the drawer open, in the darkness, a steely hand closed over his wrist, and something round and cold pressed against the back of his neck.

"SHALL I give him the works, Ed?"

"No, and keep names to yourself," snarled a second voice. "Are you holding the gat on him?"

"Sure, he walked right into my rod."

Jack sat frozen into immovability.

Suddenly the golden circle from a flash light hit him fairly in the face, blinding him for the moment. Then he could dimly see a masked man, standing behind it.

"I wish you'd take that gun from

the back of my neck," Jack said, quietly, "it might go off."

He released his hand from the drawer and the man in his rear dropped the hold on his wrist.

"Sit quiet, sonny," his captor ordered gruffly, "'till we give you the same medicine we gave the night watchman."

Jack considered the situation. The light from the flash, to be sure, was in his face, but the rest of the room was in darkness. He felt for his service revolver in his right coat pocket. His fingers closed over the butt.

"Take that light out of my face," he complained with irritation. "Who are you guys, anyway?"

"Aw, gun-whip him, feller, and be done with it," whined the man with the flash light.

The barrel was taken from his neck for an instant and Jack lurched sideways as it came downward in a vicious swing, the owner cursing because he wasn't there to receive a crack on the skull.

Flopping to the floor, Jack pulled his weapon at the same instant, and fired toward the flash light. There was a cry of pain. He couldn't have missed. The electric torch clattered to the floor and there was the sound of a falling body. But the other fellow was shooting madly, if high. Jack aimed at the flashes of red stabbing the blackness. As his finger pulled the trigger on his last chamber, he heard a detonation that seemed to take off the top of his head and he knew no more.

THEN the kerosene lamp was lighted, and he was seated again in the swivel chair, and his father's face, lined with anxiety, bent over him.

"Thank heaven, you were only

creased, lad. I waited until three o'clock in the morning, then I called June on the phone, and she said you had left there before eleven. I figured you came out here. Following a hunch I got Dr. Kitchner to come with me, carrying a first aid kit."

The circus physician was just finishing making a neat job of a bandage around his head.

"Good you have a thick skull, Jack," observed the medico. "A half inch more and you'd be a goner."

His head throbbed hotly.

"The route and the papers, dad?"

"Gone, my boy. You must have caught them just about to do their stuff. But we must wait until morning to find what other damage, if any, they have done."

"I hit one of the men, I'm sure."

"Yes, we found a pool of blood over near the window. But the thugs must be gone for hours by now."

"Where's old Ned?"

"We found him bound and gagged, behind the menagerie house."

The two men helped Jack Horton to his feet; he felt oddly dizzy and his head ached furiously, as if an engine had been placed there going at full speed.

When they reached home Dr. Kitchner gave him an opiate.

So Jack Horton was asleep the next morning at nine o'clock when his father was already down at Winter quarters.

In the menagerie house "Pop" Horton found his head animal trainer, Dick Riley, almost in tears. There in a big cage lay the forms of six dead cats, trained veteran lions that comprised a feature act with the big show. They had been poisoned by raw meat, containing arsenic, Riley figured, during the night raid by the opposition

Jack had blundered upon, so ineffectively.

CHAPTER III.

ON TOUR.

UPON his arrival at headquarters, after breaking the doctor's order to stay indoors, Jack Horton was told the bitter news of the doing away of the show's finely trained animal act, featured on the billboards and in the newspaper advertisements. Standing by while the lions were buried he was less touched by sorrow than seething with rage.

"I thought, at the very worst, we were dealing with showmen," he told his father. "I didn't think we were up against gunmen and poisoners."

"Dan Estang herds a rough crowd," returned the circus owner, quietly, "but this does surprise me. As regards the route, Jack, I can't see why Crowley was so anxious to get his hands on that. Our license contract binds a town not to allow another circus to play six weeks before our date."

"Oh, I expect an obstacle program awaits us, and the prospect isn't pleasant."

"No, and though we'll have a strong guard here from now on the damage has been done. I wouldn't have sold those cats for five thousand dollars. Riley's were the best trained lions since Bostock's."

"Can't we get any satisfaction?"

The other shrugged his shoulders. "No use accusing the Estang bunch. Those thugs you encountered were doubtless imported for this job, and are now far away. If we made a squawk they'd only laugh in our faces, and say the raid must have been made by disgruntled former employees."

"Yep, and many a canvasman and roustabout we've ordered off the lot for drunkenness or disorder. We'll have to grin and bear it."

From then on a crew of six men guarded the grounds day and night, and no strangers were admitted.

It was too late to change the route, even if Pop Horton and his son Jack had wished to switch it. Licenses had been signed and railroad contracts made months ahead by their agent; the billing cars were already at work, posting paper as far as twenty-five miles, in a radius, from each stand.

The Horton Circus opened in the home town, on schedule, April second. Jack was to remember that day vividly, for the show played to a capacity audience afternoon and night. He stood on the door watching the throngs stream in; the air was filled with dust, but the kid show was doing a healthy business and there was a long line at the red wagon. There was a jagged scar above his right ear over which the hair had not yet grown.

To-day was a happy start. There was the satisfaction, also, to him, to know that his father and he were running an absolutely clean show. Not a game or racket was tolerated; there were enough "strong" outfits with which the crooked, camp-follower gentry could travel and be welcomed; the Horton Circus fixer, Will Galloway, was an ex-detective and could smell a dip or confidence worker almost as far as he could see one. And his idea of "escorting" a grifter off the lot was not a gentle one.

REALIZING that future trouble might be a case of inside work, Jack wished he might have employed exactly the same crews of canvasmen and roustabouts, and team-

sters, that had worked for the outfit the previous season. This was impossible. These men comprised a drifting type of labor, that could not be depended upon to stick, even with a two months' holdout of salary. If Frank Crowley had planned to plant several spies in the show's employ they were doubtless on the payroll. Jack realized the probability, but it would have needed the Burns and Pinkerton detective systems combined to investigate every Tom, Dick and Harry. The heads of all departments had been warned, to be sure, and were ordered to fire a man seen making the slightest suspicious move. The idea was to cast out anything resembling sabotage before it could undermine the organization.

That first play date, in the home town, gave Jack Horton a delightful feeling, even though he inwardly realized it might be one of false security. But why look on the dark side of things? How, after all, could Estang down an outfit with such a well-loved, established name?

A demonstration was all ready and waiting.

The Tuesday, April 3, stand was Doweryville. Though only a hundred and fifty miles away, it was made as a sleeper jump, since every one slept on the cars.

Jack Horton left the owner's car at the end of the third section early, and jumped up beside a teamster taking a last load to the lot. As they drove through the business section of town Jack sensed something different in the aspect of things, somehow; the general atmosphere wouldn't tend to confirm the fact of a local holiday. It didn't seem circus day in town.

Then Jack's eyes chanced to glance at billboards posted on the side of

buildings and unfamiliar cards that lined the windows of stores.

He stifled an exclamation, for he wasn't looking at Horton Circus show paper!

Instead, the billing all read:

APRIL 2—TWO PERFORMANCES

Matinée and Night

Ericville, Minn.

**THE ESTANG BROTHERS CIRCUS
ASSOCIATION**

THE GREATEST SHOW SINCE BARNUM'S

**Ignore Imitators. Our Stellar Spectacular
Consolidation of Supreme Wonders, Bewil-
dering in Three Rings, Two Platforms, and
in the Air, is Unequalled Under Canvas**

Jack whistled in amazement and turned to the teamster.

"You're from this state, Dick; where's Ericville?"

"'Bout a mile away, just outside the city limits of Doweryville."

"So that's it," muttered the junior member of the firm.

He saw it all clearly now—why the Estang brothers, represented by Frank Crowley, had wanted so desperately the copy of their route. True, as his father had said, no other circus could obtain a license for a play date in a town contracted by them; but that didn't stop the opposition from pitching its tents outside the city's boundary line, with the added advantage of getting a lot and license more cheaply, and yet drawing on exactly the same population the Horton Circus expected to attend.

Jack's own billing? Covered, unquestionably, by an opposition brigade, after the Horton crew of billposters had done their job and passed on. A day late—and they only had the newspapers to rely upon to spread the news,

and the last-minute ballyhoo of the parade.

HE could hardly hold his patience until the slow team of truck horses finally arrived at the lot. He leaped to the ground, and started to look for his father, always the first on the grounds and the last to leave.

His dad was found behind the red ticket wagon, arguing with an excited group of townspeople.

"But I have a list here of everything my twenty-four-hour-man ordered," the owner was insisting. "I can't understand these unauthorized supplies at all."

"Well, a smooth-tongued article who said he represented your circus signed for a thousand pounds of beef," insisted one red-faced individual, sullenly, "and I've delivered it to the cook house."

"And I've dumped a ton of feed behind the menagerie," growled a farmer. "The buyer on tick told me he was the agent for the Horton show."

Pop Horton turned to his son and led him out of earshot.

"Rush to town," he commanded, "and get Al Devlin on long distance. He's somewhere in Torrentown. Tell him a fake agent is ordering huge quantities of food and feed to get us in wrong. He must make the rounds in each stand and broadcast that he only has the say-so to have our demands filled. If I don't take this stuff, now delivered on the lot, these wild-eyed dealers will likely enough take out attachments. Our running up against that, or overbuying what we can't use, is exactly what Dan Estang has framed for us."

Jack jumped into his father's rig and drove the team to town. It took him

over an hour to catch Al Devlin, and explain that a false agent was impersonating him, and that he must make it widely known that he was the one and only agent, a day ahead of the outfit.

Coming back to the lot, Jack looked vainly for some of the Horton Circus paper. He couldn't find any, but upon stopping several times, and tearing away with his fingers the Estang billing, he found that his own was underneath. Most carefully and effectively, it had been covered over.

The sound of music came to him from a distance. The big brass band was heading the parade of a circus—just one day late.

It was a question whether the same audiences would respond to the spell of the sawdust, and the high wire, two days in succession. The Estang brothers had skimmed the cream, and the late comer would have to take what was left.

The afternoon performance more than fulfilled his pessimistic outlook. The attendance was meager. Inside the big top there were long, bare patches in the "blues," and the reserved sections weren't within one half of capacity.

The ticket takers lounged listlessly at the main entrance, under the marquee, and the acts were doing their routines, to the cues furnished by the band, in a slowed-down manner that indicated poor morale. A general blight seemed to have nipped the wonderful spirit of the previous day. News of the Estang attacks had leaked out.

THAT night the intake was a little better than the matinée, but not much. The engagement was a decided flop.

Jack hated to think of what the show

was losing in hard cash. Nine hundred "kinkers," and members of the working crews were fed three times a day, and the railroad that moved three sections of cars had no credit system. The circus bank roll wasn't so "forty." Losses weren't expected. Why, there hadn't been a losing season since the year of the panic when Jack was a boy.

He waited until the boss canvasman started to strike the tents about the big top. Then he tried to throw off a persistent feeling of gloom by walking, at a brisk pace, down to the railroad yards. He made his way down the long line of flats, painted red and yellow, until he reached the third section, and the Horton sleeper at the extreme end. An owner always rode with all possible trouble ahead of him.

As he climbed the steps, and threw open the door, Jack found his father and Will Galloway, the fixer, in earnest consultation. Pop Horton looked anxious. Will, the squeal-squarer, wore his usual poker expression.

"Well, what's the verdict, folks? Getting ready for the casket maker?" Jack's tone was bitterly jocular.

"I don't know how many days we can stand this kind of a jolt to the jaw," said the elder Horton. "I have the bad news from the red wagon, and we're starting to carry a heavy loss already."

"With our billing all smeared, and Estang having the edge on us by showing yesterday at Ericville, what else could be expected?"

"More of the same, and worse," snarled Galloway, "a cutthroat game from now on. I've heard of Dan Estang and his bandits, plenty. My brother was with the Langley Show that went under in the Northwest."

"What do you suggest, Will?" asked Pop Horton, quietly.

The fixer's usually pale face flushed with an inner fire.

"I'd say fight 'em with the same kind of blows—under the belt. Give me permission, and a few picked men, and I'll wreck their damned trains for them, pile them up like kindling wood for a picnic. There's only two men on an engine, you know. I used to carry a Brotherhood card, and what I don't know about running a iron bus you can write under a two-cent stamp."

"But, Bill," remonstrated the owner, "that would be worse than the other feller. We haven't suffered any loss of life as yet."

"No?" exclaimed the other. "Then just wait. That Estang gang is only beginning. You want to stand by, eh, until your back is up against the wall, and your spine pushing through, 'fore you fight back? Let 'em give you the entire works? You've had things too easy, Mr. Horton, if you'll pardon my saying so. Me, I was brought up by old man Wallace, out of Peru, Indiana, and he always believed in jumping the other feller and going him one better. Why, when the jaspers rebelled at being gulled by a bunch of grifters, who paid him for protection, Ben Wallace issued muskets and we'd fight our way to the cars and out of town. I bet you one thing—in less than ten days you'll be sending for me, and giving me a box of dynamite, with a batch of fuses, to hand the Estang crowd as a friendly present."

He slouched to his feet and out of the car.

"I agree with Will," said Jack stoutly. "The best defense is a good offensive, and we must use our enemies' weapons."

Pop Horton made no reply, looking unseeingly into space, his hands clenched so that the knuckles showed

white. He was slow to be driven to an anger that called for violence, but there was a limit to his endurance.

CHAPTER IV.

THE LAST STRAW.

THE next stand was Burlingport. Whatever the reason, Jack Horton was delighted to find that his paper was still "living," as billposters call lithographs untorn and uncovered. The Estang tents hadn't been pitched near-by before his own show's arrival.

Arriving at the lot for breakfast, he was asked by the head teamster, Bill Hardy, if he wouldn't help out by riding at the head of the parade. Hardy had never played Burlingport before, being new on the show, while it was an old stand to the other.

Jack was so pleased at the day's cessation of the one-sided guerilla warfare that he agreed, with alacrity, to accompany the man. As a usual thing he would have named off one of a dozen veteran drivers.

Soon as the morning meal was over, served from giant traveling kitchens, the wind-jammers and kinkers changed into colorful costumes and uniforms, and took their places on the allotted wagons in the cavalcade. Clowns, jockeys, and Roman charioteers joined the long line, a feature of which was ten camels and a herd of elephants.

These bulls were the pride of the circus, which boasted possession of two species, the Asiatic and the African, the first named being the brightest, distinguished by smaller ears. The African elephants had great flapping organs covering a fifth of the body. Their beady black eyes glittered wickedly, when annoyed, and the bull men watched them closely on parade.

Weighing close onto two tons, and of astonishing agility, these mammoth beasts were dangerous if crossed.

Several of them were getting old, shown by the turnover of the ears—an overlap of one inch meaning thirty years of life, up to two inches, half a century. And it is as age creeps on that deviltry crops out in this animal, and he's generally shot, instead of dying a natural death, because of becoming a man-killer.

With a crash of drums, a blare of cymbals, and the toot of the calliope, the parade slowly got under way.

Jack felt in the best of spirits. He had believed that the opposition intended to cover their billing and play outside city limits, the day before their arrival, indefinitely. It seemed like old times now, peaceful, and free from worry.

As the ten-horse team leading the pageantry reached the main avenue of the town, the sidewalks on both sides were packed with local residents and visitors. Along the curbs were parked a host of machines and teams from different points in the county. This last was the business that counted.

'Way behind him Jack could hear the voice of a trainer, megaphoning: "Watch your horses; folks. The camels and elephants are coming."

Equines often become restive and panicky at the first sight of these huge, bespangled creatures lumbering into view. Since teams had become run-aways on many occasions, the warning was necessary.

JACK HORTON was remembering the course the parade had taken last season, the turn at the church, and thence back through the residential district. Strangely, he found that he entirely forgot a town until he returned

to it, when varied memories came back in a flood.

He was just about to tell the head teamster, beside him, where to turn, when he heard one of the most frightening sounds a circus man can hear—the shrill, wild shriek of a maddened elephant. There is nothing quite so terribly piercing, nor any sound that allows the imagination to picture such awful possibilities. Again and again the high, sharp, raucous scream rent the air, making it known that one of the big bulls was on a rampage.

Instantly the head teamster blew his whistle, a signal for the parade to stop.

Pale as a sheet, Jack leaped from the seat to the front wheel and thence to the ground. He started sprinting back along the line, hoping against hope that he wasn't approaching a dreaded stampede of the elephant herd.

As he neared the confusion he saw that something had crazed one of the African bulls. Trumpeting his rage, the animal swerved out of line, his trunk dropping the tail of the beast in front of him. Bellowing savagely, the monster started in a lumbering gait toward the sidewalk.

The crowd broke on either side of him, in panic, giving him plenty of room for any mischief he might have in mind. Swinging his trunk from side to side, the bull lowered his head and charged against the show window of a store, the glass giving with a crash. Startled a bit he backed away, then finding he was unhurt by the falling glass, he started to smash one window after another, pulling the contents onto the sidewalk and trampling the merchandise in his fury.

Four bull men, holding short spear prods, stood about the elephant, at a short distance, ready to persuade him when his temper quieted down.

Jack ran up to Murphy, the head trainer of the herd.

"What happened? Can we stop loss of life? That's the main thing."

"Bruno's getting better now, he's having his own way. We'll close in on him in a minute. If I catch that rascal who was leading him there'll be a broken head to treat in some hospital. A new man, sir."

"What did he do?"

"Gave that unsuspecting bull a big swig of rot-gut whisky. There's nothing in creation that makes an elephant crazier. I saw it out of the corner of my eye when it was too late. As Bruno broke formation the fellow darted down a side street—and that's the last we will see of him."

Suddenly he commanded:

"Now's the time, men!"

On the instant, the four bull men quietly neared Bruno and spoke to him softly.

The intelligent beast made a low moan of pain, as the men slowly led him back into his place.

CATCHING sight of Will Galio-way, who had some job on his hands in settling all the damage that had been done, Jack sprinted ahead to help guide the parade again.

He was heavy at heart. The fixer would do his best, but the windows of half a block of the finest stores in town had been broken and the contents trod upon by a two-ton elephant. The damages would be something to regard with awe in their totality—and pay on the dot. The circus didn't have a leg to stand upon in the way of an excuse.

The parade must go on. It slowly got under way, Jack giving instructions to the driver by his side.

The worst of it all was that this mishap was no freak of bad luck, but a

disaster that had been planned; because of the unpredictable turns an elephant's rage can take, many lives might have been lost.

No, it was no accident that could be explained away.

Every bull man knows that his charge is the one and original prohibitionist, whom whisky will drive into an insane fit of tantrums.

The new man who had poured nearly a pint of liquor down Bruno's throat must have done so with no other motive than that of starting a disastrous stampede. All suspicion pointed one way: he was unquestionably a paid schemer in the employ of the Estangs.

Discounting the lack of loss of life, Jack groaned at the thought of the damages they could so ill afford to pay, and of the harmful publicity. The afternoon papers would carry the story, with headlines, making the incident appear much worse than in actuality; the Associated Press would boil down the account and telegraph it to all parts of the country. It would have the effect of deterring many people, particularly those with children, from attending the circus. Before gossip had finished, it would appear that the entire herd had taken fright and charged the frightened throng.

His father had hesitated at the thought of reprisals. But what further punishment could he ask for, before hitting back, under the belt?

CHAPTER V.

STORM STRIKES.

JACK found his father on the back steps of the red wagon, consulting through the door with Ted Bronson, the treasurer and ticket seller. Their conversation came to an abrupt

stop as Jack quickly broke the bad news of Bruno's breakaway.

"Of course that bull man who slipped the elephant whisky was in Dan Estang's employ," murmured the owner, and then he paused, in horror: "Think of the lives that might have been lost!"

"It's a darn good thing your show people are in the habit of letting their salaries ride, sometimes for months and months," said Bronson, in a matter-of-fact tone. "Will Galloway will be back shortly with a tale of woe that will make me throw away the elastic that holds the bank roll. I bet it takes four or five grand to square this. And I'm afraid that affair 'll hurt the gate."

"What next?" exclaimed the owner, desperately.

"Next," announced Jack, icily, "we won't have any outfit to worry about; there'll be nothing left except a name. The Greater Hunter and the John Pelton Dog and Pony were as strong organizations as ours, and they were snowed under. Dad, we must fight back, or it will be only a question of time—and a short time at that."

The elder man's shoulders drooped.

"If I were only younger! My mind's tired and my thoughts run around in a circle like a squirrel in a cage. You're so sure something must be done, boy; what do you suggest?"

The younger man was silent. No practical scheme had framed itself in his mind, though this standing passive, on the receiving end of blow after blow, was sickening enough.

"I don't know, father," he replied, "but I believe that Will could cook up something."

"And land us all in jail," Horton muttered, under his breath.

Yet there was no question that the show was facing swift extinction,

Merely figured from a financial viewpoint, how long could the bank roll stand the strain? Too much money, perhaps, had gone to build the new Horton home the previous year. But no such onslaught on the very life of the circus had been imagined or expected. Live and let live had been the Horton motto; but now they must battle for self-preservation, or an opposition that stopped at nothing would surely gobble them up.

Jack realized, in a measure, his father's attitude, so hard to break after being so well established. During the best years of his life the owner had been the prime mover in the building of a fine, clean show, unsmirched by graft, and conducted on the honest, open lines of modern business. Pop Horton had put graft definitely behind him those early days, when practically all tented organizations drew a partial revenue from "gyp" camp followers, with whom everything went from knock-out drops to sandbagging. After those old-time circuses were loaded, many a dead body had been buried under the ring bank.

BY fighting the Estang brothers on their own contemptible level, Pop Horton doubtless felt that he would be lowering the high standard of showmanship of which he was so justly proud.

His son, to the contrary, held that after what had happened any weapon they might use to fight back became legitimate. You can't argue like a gentleman with a thug, armed with a black-jack, brass knuckles and a gat. If a length of lead pipe is handy, try to crush his skull like an egg! More convincing and effective than any lecture.

Up to now the Hortons had been noncombatants. The result was that

things were going from bad to worse. Another day of heavy loss was foreshadowed by parade damages, and now that they were on the run, the Estang gang couldn't be expected to let up. In the course of putting three established shows out of business they must have discovered a vast assortment of unfair and foul tricks for their repertoire.

Within an hour Will Galloway was seen slowly advancing up the midway. His demeanor was not like that of one who has come off a victor in a contest, for he slouched along with his head down. He found Pop Horton and Jack standing a distance from one another under the marquee.

No greetings were exchanged.

The fixer drew a long sheet of paper from his inside pocket.

"I'm sorry, boss, but I admit that I come off second best. Those storekeepers know they have us dead to rights. If we refuse to settle, they could take out attachments that would tie us up tighter than a strait-jacket."

He passed the owner the sheet.

"Thirty-eight hundred dollars—all cash," Horton muttered under his breath. "But we're in a box. I suppose you told 'em we'd settle after the matinée?"

The other nodded.

"Yet if that bull hadn't gone on a window-breaking spree, he might have crippled and killed—and that would have meant bankruptcy."

"It means that, anyway, if things like this go on."

"They certainly will go on," said the fixer, coldly. "By the time you get ready to strike back, I'm afraid you'll be stranded."

There was an edge of insolence in the tone, but Pop Horton did not resent it. He knew his employee was loyal, filled

with resentment at his docility under punishment.

"I've asked Jack, here, and he can suggest nothing. Have you any plan, Will?"

"Not exactly, but you can't hit at Dan Estang with a long range gun. Let me take a trip to the brothers' show—I can find where they are from our passenger agent—and look things over. Give me an open field and I promise developments. I'm just the tough bird for the work."

"I'd like to go along," exclaimed Jack who had drawn near to hear the conversation, "but Frank Crowley knows me by sight."

"Give me time—just a little time—to think it over," returned Pop Horton.

AS if to add to the general gloom the sky suddenly became overcast.

Soon a dreary drizzle started to fall, just at a time when it would affect the business of the afternoon performance. The rain soon developed into a steady downpour, and the wind began to blow from the east.

There is probably nothing more cheerful or sunny than a circus in good weather, nor as depressing as one under canvas in bad. The tents are supposed to be waterproof, but a mist spreads everywhere and dampness rises from the ground. Joyful illusion is swept away, and the acts appear tiresome and mechanical. Acrobats, high wire artists, and bareback riders cannot put their hearts into their work under such conditions; the clowns are stale and forced; the audience wonders why it didn't stay at home, and even the little children miss something that vanished with the sunlight.

Of course the particular effect on Pop Horton and his son was caused by the fact that the attendance was off,

the big top half empty. Thirty-eight hundred dollars was going out in cold cash.

Long before the performance was over, however, the wind had increased to a gale. Ropes strained at the stakes, and the sidewalls of canvas billowed under the pressure of the wind and rain beating against them.

Jack breathed a sigh of relief when the concert was over and the audience started to stream out into the rain. He would see the boss canvasman and advise him to brace the side poles more securely.

As he looked about for that worthy, shouts came from inside the big top. Overhead the vast mushroom spread of canvas trembled, and cracking sounds came, loud as pistol explosions, from splintering wood; the tent started to crumple at its peak, and then caved in grotesquely, flopping quickly to the ground.

Without an order all hands rushed to join a rescue crew. There were people under that heavy canvas, and there was no telling how the center poles had fallen. Canvasmen and roustabouts worked madly, first rescuing uniformed ushers almost smothered under that rain-heavy tent.

Four members of the band had been knocked out by one of the poles, and were carried directly over to the cook tent, where Dr. Kitchner brought his first aid supplies. Three men in the audience were bruised and battered, but only one of them, with a broken leg, needed hospital attention. He was made as comfortable as possible, and driven to his home, where he insisted upon being taken.

After a thorough search disclosed the worst, a crew of men worked like beavers to repair the material damage; the center poles were mended with bolts

and heavy wire. The big top must be up again in time for the evening show. Supper was not to be thought of, but coffee and hot food was waiting for all.

It was seven thirty before things were normal again.

WIPING the sweat from his face with a soggy rag, Pete Taylor, the boss canvasman, reported to Pop Horton.

Coat off and sleeves rolled up, Jack kept pace with him, his eyes like twin pools of ice.

"I have to report," said Taylor grimly, "that those center poles didn't bust from the blow, sir. They'd been carefully sawed more'n three-quarters through, the space filled with putty and rubbed over with some kind of blacking. If the show hadn't been let out it's a certainty that lots of people would have been killed in the panic."

Pop Horton paled.

"Do you suspect any one, Taylor?"

The big man shrugged his shoulders.

"I have three hundred men under me, lots of 'em new help. Can't keep my eyes on 'em all the time. We're all O. K. for to-night, sir."

He lumbered away, and the owner faced his now openly rebellious son.

"What do you say, dad: are you ready, now, for Will and me to leave for the Estang outfit?"

"Yes, but Will must go on first—do his darnedest—and send for you when you are needed. He can take a crew with him, if need be, of the most hard-boiled birds on the lot. Anything goes, after this. I could hear of the Estang brothers and their murderous gang being exterminated without a twinge of conscience."

"That's the spirit, dad," said Jack gruffly. "I knew you'd get that way if they drove you hard enough. Since

you've said the word, just leave things to the younger generation."

CHAPTER VI.

JOINING ON.

AFTER obtaining information from a friendly station agent, Will Galloway left that evening for the town of Granton, situated on the western edge of the State.

Meantime, though Will left with their earnest best wishes, the elder Horton and his son were weighed down by the inevitable aftermath of the blow-down. Consequences, in the shape of damage suits, were sure to catch up with them. That it might have been worse didn't help a gloomy reaction.

The next stand was Strungbilt, where the tactics of their opposition varied a bit. Circus billing still blazoned forth the charms of the tan bark, but all newspaper advertising had been withdrawn a week previous. Using a forged letterhead, some one had canceled every display ad, and the local sheets were informed the route of the Horton Circus had been changed, and it wouldn't hold forth in Strungbilt this season. News items had disseminated the information to the public. Business could be expected to suffer accordingly.

But Jack Horton still held to his hunch that the fixer could be counted upon to accomplish something. Will Galloway was purposeful, if somewhat unscrupulous; and after all, the time was past for qualms of conscience. But Will would have to work fast. It was uncertain just how long the Horton bank roll might stand such a continual drain on it, but not far into the season, that was a certainty.

4 A

Oh, to be with Will, planning to hit back! Jack Horton felt, in the strength of his leashed anger and seething resentment, that he alone was worth a battalion of shock troops.

He was standing under the marquee, estimating with a calculating eye the slowly coming attendance, not up to standard years, when a messenger boy from Western Union came toward him from the red wagon. He read the slip eagerly:

Meet me Terryville to-morrow at eleven lobby Berry House. You are in luck Frank Crowley in hospital. Bring service weapon and five century notes.

WILL.

The messenger was gazing wistfully toward the swaying canvas flaps behind the ticket takers on the "door" through which people were passing.

"Want to go inside?" Jack offered, in his joy at the prospect of action at last.

The lad hesitated. "Can I—to-night?"

"Sure, kid, you bring good news. See that big man who looks like a Senator, or a bartender?"

"Yes, sir."

"I'll speak to him, now, and point you out. He'll remember you to-night; and you can bring any one along you like."

WAVING the yellow sheet exultingly, Jack went in search of his father, finding him just leaving the menagerie top. He waited impatiently until the message had been read.

"Looks good, dad," he exclaimed. "Will must have schemed a way. I'll join him, of course."

The other nodded.

"I couldn't hold you, son," smiling

wryly. "Draw the money from Bronson. We're so far in the hole that five more 'yards' won't skin much more off the bank roll."

The younger man flushed a bit.

"I'm going to give the treasurer a check covering my personal bank account back home. I have a couple of grand saved—it may help out."

Pop Horton wrung his son's hand in silence. Then he turned aside quickly, to hide an expression of emotion frowned upon in the tented world.

"Good luck, boy," he whispered huskily.

Jack's eyes were a bit wet, too. Blood is thicker than water, but it was loyalty that brought them so close to one another; loyalty to the circus that bore their name.

At ten thirty that evening Jack Horton had his "turkey" packed, and reached the railroad station in good time to board his train.

The next morning he alighted on the Terryville station platform, his eyes glancing curiously at a line of cars on a siding, blue and white lettering conspicuously painted along the side of each:

ESTANG BROTHERS CIRCUS ASSOCIATION

It was a brisk spring morning. Ignoring the calls of several jitney drivers, he started walking up along the deeply rutted road to town. Heavy trucks with equipment had made a wreck of the highway, but he avoided the worst of it by keeping to a gravel path until he hit the paved streets.

In the Berry House lobby, holding a newspaper listlessly, sat Will Gallo-way, his face bored looking and impassive.

Jack hurried through the swinging door. Will had evidently caught sight

of him, for he sauntered around the row of chairs.

"Well, I declare, if it isn't my old friend Mark Connors!" the fixer exclaimed breezily. "Right on the dot." He grasped Jack's hand and shook it up and down like the handle of a pump.

"Come right upstairs and see my samples," he rattled on, gently propelling the other toward the elevator. "You'll never go wrong dealing with 'Honest' Bill Wolton."

"Guess not, Bill."

So his new moniker was Mark Connors—and the fixer's Bill Wolton! Jack admired the natural manner in which the names had been broached to him. As they entered Will's room, the fixer pointed to an armchair near the window.

"**P**ARK yourself, kid, and be yourself, too. The rooms on either side of us aren't occupied. You'll be surprised, I'm jake with this outfit already. 'Honest' Bill Wolton—ain't that a swell handle for a dip?"

"I'll say so, but what's all this about Frank Crowley?"

"Went to the hospital couple of days ago with acute appendicitis. You have to get a break once in a while. Maybe he will croak, never can tell. Till he is on deck again we have time—"

The fixer's eyes were cold and he smiled frostily. "Time to ditch this crooked layout in mud so deep all the elephants in the world can't push 'em out."

"Yeah? Tell me of your approach."

"I made arrangements with Dan Estang for a pickpocket privilege. I'm supposed to be an A-1 'wire,' waitin' for you, my 'stall,' to come on from the East."

Jack Horton whistled.

"How much do they nick us?"

"A century a week, and find your own, 'less you want to pay for a berth on the circus sleeper."

"And what do you expect this to get us?"

"A free runabout anywhere on the lot without arousing suspicion. Right in plain view, we can plan without a possible rap against us by any of the camp followers."

"You've been working fast."

"Better than that. I'm getting the low-down on the stuff pulled by the worst gyp circus that ever disgraced the show world—and I see a way to pay 'em in their own coin without calling in a hayseed sheriff."

"Tell me," demanded Jack eagerly.

"Genius don't work like that," grinned Galloway. "You'll have to see this develop, and maybe think up something yourself. Check your conscience as we leave the hotel."

"Bad as that, eh?"

"Worse. I got in me the makings of a first-class anarchist. The last of the Czars has checked out, but Dan Estang will do."

"**YOU'RE** lookin' at a 'strong' show that's got anything beat," said Will with a sweep of his hand as they approached the Estang Brothers' lot, a wide plain north of Terryville; "but you will judge for yourself. Thimblerrigging, shell games, three card monte, and 'gaffed' gambling devices, all runnin' wide open."

"And the police?" queried Jack curiously.

"Oh, they're experts in the gentle art of shakedown."

As they neared the grounds Jack took in the scene with interest. The midway was a wide one; the tents, of course, were pitched differently than with the Horton Circus. The kid

show, and its ballyhoo platform, was set well back. The menagerie top was viewed in a tent passed through before entering the big top. Lying parallel to the ticket wagons, and straggling along for a couple of hundred yards, was a row of booths, conducted by leather lunged operators.

"Some joints, eh?" said Will. "Give 'em the once-over. I'll give you a knockdown to Dan Estang when the show is in."

Jack nodded. It was all new, naturally enough, since he had never seen any other outfit under canvas except the circus bearing the family name. This sphere of grifterdom was strange to him.

Before they reached the booths his attention was called to a loudly dressed come-on man who was calling a throng of "jaspers" about him, as he pointed and gestured at a pack of cards, the only ornament of a plain card table, four feet square, in front of where he stood.

"Gents, gather closer. I only do this trick a few times a day; the mental concentration is terrible. It's a clean bet, friends, my money against yours. I'll turn my back; and then one man, or ten, may shuffle the cards. Then I shall face you again, and at my first cut I will cut the queen of hearts!"

"Can we all shuffle them cards?" asked a farmer doubtfully.

"Sure thing; one and all. Now who wants to start the bettin'?"

He pulled a thick wad of bills from his pocket. Half a dozen spectators made bets running from one to five dollars.

As he turned his back the pack of cards was quickly plucked from the table and passed from hand to hand. After industrious shuffling it was placed again on the table.

"Time to turn around?"

There was a chorus of assent. The grifter wheeled about, viewed the crowd with a gloating look; then deliberately he drew a pocketknife from his pocket, the blade having a razor-like edge. He grasped the deck of cards with his left hand, and with the neatness of long practice, sliced the pack in half.

"That's my *first cut*," he exclaimed. "I did exactly what I promised, cut the queen of hearts at my first cut! Everybody satisfied?"

There was a roar of laughter from those who hadn't bet. Those who had lost their money slunk away, discomfited at the ridicule.

THE sure-thing gambler beamed at the others.

"Put a quarter, the small part of a dollar, on the table," he pleaded. "I guarantee to double your money in plain sight, or pay four to one—every party who bets gets a dollar."

Coins jingled as they were planked down in front of him.

"Now will some gent count his bank roll and then pass it to me for a few moments?"

A smart aleck passed over a thin sheaf of bills.

"Fourteen dollars there, feller," the sucker said sharply.

The grifter took the paper money and checked up the amount.

"Boys, I said I could double your money, and I can, all day long. Watch me take these bills and double 'em immediate." He folded the bills over carefully in the center. "No gent can say this money ain't *doubled*!"

Handing the exhibit back to the man he scooped up the quarters. Will and Jack both laughed at the barefaced effrontery. Yet, in a manner of speak-

ing, the grafter did keep to the track of his double-meaning promises.

Next ahead was an open booth, a large sign swaying over it:

NOT A GAME OF CHANCE

"That's right," laughed Will, "the rubes aren't even given a chance."

Before them was a so-called Spindle Game, simple enough, since on a shelf was ten numbered spaces on which to bet. The operator was giving odds of twenty to one, and fifty to two dollars. These odds looked good enough, but, somehow, the swinging spindle always seemed to come to rest in a blank space on which there was little wagering. All but once, and then, Will said, a shillaber in the gambler's pay was allowed to win fifty dollars as a come-on.

The board was covered with green cloth, held snugly by thumb tacks around the sides.

Will explained in a low tone of voice. "There's a slim rod running through to the pivot of that spindle. While the arrow is spinning the grifter rests his hands on the back of the board, naturally enough, ready to push with his thumb a thumb tack on the outer end of that rod. He uses pressure as the arrow slows down, to make it stop in the lowest bet on space, or one covered by a "shill." Simple, eh, and as there's thumb tacks runnin' all round the board, no one will suspect."

Jack nodded.

"It's a great grind; not a gamble at all," murmured the fixer.

He guided Jack to the Wheel of Chance, where men were placing coins and dollars on the numbered laydown.

"All through," yelled the operator, and he whirled the wheel. A leather indicator bounced as each wire section went by; as the wheel finally stopped,

after countless revolutions, the section in which the leather strip hung was declared the winner.

The sections with the large bets on them always seemed to lose.

"Easy," chirped Will, in Jack's ear. "As that bird turns to start the wheel he pushed a sharp tack, with a heavy slug of lead soldered on it, at the back of the number most heavily played by the suckers. The wheel, being light as can be, has to stop with the number bearing the weight at the bottom."

They passed along, inspecting the String Game, the Miniature Race Track, the Swinging Ball, and other high percentage gambling devices, so "gimmicked" that the public had no run for its money. As Will explained the various ways in which the games were gaffed, Jack could understand how the operators could afford to pay important money for privileges and still find the going good. Those who did give prizes, instead of playing for cash, only parted with junk, called "slum"; the beautiful sets of silver and the doll lamp shades never left their stands at the back of the booths.

"THIS is petty larceny," said the fixer. "The real rough stuff isn't pulled till nighttime. The crowd's almost in. We'll look up Dan Estang, who is his own squeal squarer—afraid of being double crossed. I told him you carried the dough, so slip him a hundred as a first week's protection for a couple of Eastern dips. And remember—"

"You're 'Honest' Bill Wolton, and I'm Mark Connors. I cracked wise right away. No need to coach me, Bill, I'm on," Jack nodded.

At the right of the main entrance, and a few paces to the back, was a replica of an officer's brown canvas army

tent. A huge negro, of a bruiser type, lolled in front of it.

"We want to see the main guy. We're joining on," explained Will.

"Yep, I remembers you; is this yere buddy?"

The fixer nodded.

"Walk right in, gents. Mister Estang is allus ready for business."

The guard smiled, displaying a fine set of store teeth. Will pulled back the side flap of the tent and the two men entered. Inside the light was a bit dim. Behind a long table, littered with papers, sat a tall, thin creature, all skin-stretched bone and muscle. His face, creased with fine wrinkles, was pallid, yet healthy, as if the sun had no effect; the eyes gray, slate-colored, with tiny pupils and thin band of iris; the nose long, delicate, yet predatory. The mouth was a narrow slit, the lips turned inward, hardly showing.

Deep lines from nose to mouth, and short-cropped hair, streaked with white, placed him as middle-aged, but keen and perfectly balanced, possessing an energy ready at all times on call. This was Dan Estang.

"Good afternoon, gentlemen," he said suavely, with a hint of sarcasm on the word gentlemen. "Pray pick yourselves seats. You were in yesterday. Honest Bill Wolton, you told me."

Will and Jack picked camp chairs.

"Yes. This is my side-kick, Mark Connors," began the fixer. "Smooth as they make 'em, and as hard to hold. He acts as a stall while I reef a britch and get the poke, or clip a sucker for his front. We divide quite a bundle of scratch before the season's over."

"Well, keep some 'fall' money," rejoined Estang coldly. "We fix the local law generally; if not, you'll get the office to lay off. But you're not amateurs."

"No, we've worked all the Eastern fairs, and never got into the stone mansion, 'cept in Brockton, when they called out the State police."

He turned to Jack Horton.

"Mark, meet the big boss, Mr. Dan Estang. He receives the century note each week in person. Mr. Estang, this is my partner, Mark Connors."

The newcomer held out his hand with a natural gesture, but the circus owner only regarded it curiously, smiling faintly—and Jack dropped it quickly. He sensed Estang's contempt; the man would deal with cheap crooks, yet hold himself above them. Pulling a wad of greenbacks from his pocket, he placed a hundred-dollar bill on the table.

"No receipt necessary," declared Estang crisply. "You have the freedom of the lot now, and so long as you don't butt into anybody else's racket you'll get protection. If you don't mind I'll ask you to run along. I'm busy."

"You'll have nothing on us," drawled Will, and Jack forced a grin, his teeth set.

Acquaintance but added to the sight-unseen aversion he had entertained for Dan Estang. Evidently the man's success had nothing to do with making himself liked. Yet never before had Estang run up against the hatred he was to encounter from these two schemers.

CHAPTER VII.

IN THE COLD GRAY DAWN.

THERE was one saving grace about the procession Will and Jack essayed on the Estang outfit. They weren't supposed to expose themselves in the limelight of observation, and the throngs in the midway were, as a rule,

only large enough to work before and after a performance. According to Will there were twelve other pickpockets in their branch of clean-up. Six worked as wires, the same number as stalls, engaging the attention of the marks so they might be fleeced unawares.

A "finder" was paid a small sum weekly by each dip, and this pair would also be called upon to contribute.

This individual, wearing a shiny five-starred badge marked "special officer," mingled in the throngs near the main entrance and the kid top, before which brightly painted banners flaunted the weird attractions of the freaks within.

"Beware the pickpockets! Be sure your valuables and wallets are safe!" he shouted in a voice that had the carrying power of a fog horn.

People instinctively would feel where they carried their money, thus giving tips to the pickpockets.

That first afternoon and evening the two supposed dips, though certain they'd been taken at face value, did their share of jostling, to be on the safe side. Now and again an assistant squarer of Estang's warned various light-fingered gentry to make themselves scarce for a time; too loud a squawk had gone up at the owner's tent.

Jack noticed that first night quite a lot of quiet and serious drinking going on. Couples slipped off into the semi-darkness at the sides of tents to tip the bottle. Farmers of the more prosperous sort, mostly accompanied by others who had nothing of the small town in their appearance, flashily dressed, and loud-mouthed, with the back-slapping manner of crafty good fellows.

Before the show let out, Jack and his companion became separated.

Young Horton saw the fixer emerging from behind the kid show as the throng poured from the main entrance, and noticed the slow smile of triumph on his face.

"Let's make ourselves scarce—stroll toward town—till the circus is loaded and has left the lot. I've found for sure something I was tipped off to, and it may be stuff that 'll bear handlin'," Will explained.

Jack agreed, realizing that Will never went off halfcocked. They walked toward the village, and upon reaching there waited in a lunch wagon, the windows of which faced the main stem, taking their time over coffee and doughnuts, until the last of the heavy trucks bearing equipment lumbered by. Then they paid for their snack and made their way briskly back to the circus lot.

That particular stretch of ground now looked like the aftermath of a monster picnic, desolate in the moonlight.

Sawdust, papers, old boxes, and refuse was strewn in a confused litter. But that wasn't all; splotches sprawled here and there were revealed as the forms of men, fallen as if struck by lightning, still and unconscious.

WILL shook one of the sodden bodies, but could not awaken the man; middle-aged, of prosperous appearance, it was strange to find him lying open mouthed and oblivious to everything, like a common tramp overcome by drink. As the fixer leaned over, listening to the slow, heavy breathing, he clicked his tongue on a discovery.

"I've got it, Jack," he exclaimed. "These fellows were given a few good swigs, then knockout drops—chloral hydrate—mixed with whisky. I doubt

if you could bring 'em out of it until morning."

"What's the big idea?"

"I learned that, but I wasn't told about the doped liquor to keep them out of the picture till the show pulled out of town. Dan Estang has four advance men hitting the rural districts, seeking well-to-do farmers. They're told the circus is oversupplied with prime draft stock, and that the horses are to be sold off at ridiculously low prices, way below the market, after the evenin' performance. They're to come well-heeled with cash for some rare bargains. On arrival at the circus lot, when they tell their purpose in coming, they are entertained, so to speak. A good many farmers are ready soppers of O.P.W."

"What's that?"

"Other people's whisky. Particularly when they're all set to get more'n their money's worth. When a jasper says he has enough, one last drink's suggested, I figure, the flasks are switched and the victim is given the Mickey Finn."

"And when they do wake up, with a heavy hangover, they'll be too ashamed to complain—"

"Also, the show's skipped town."

Jack Horton's brain suddenly started working overtime.

"You know that old gag," he said slowly, "about in union there is strength."

Will smiled.

"Yeah, and what of it? This ain't no flag waving exercise."

"No, but some of those old chestnuts have a kernel of truth. What's the next stand?"

"Toulenville."

"We can make it in the morning," Jack declared. "You can go back to the hotel and get a good night's sleep.

I'm going to nap on that hay yonder. I want to be here at dawn."

"I'll stay, too," said the other, stubbornly.

Without further words they tried to make themselves as comfortable as possible on some hay left by the menagerie. It was a balmy April night, but they were both warmly dressed, and sleeping in the open entailed no special hardship.

Jack awakened first, just as a cold, gray dawn lifted and a heavy dew made their improvised mattress soggy and full of lumps. Forms were stirring about him. A farmer near by began to yawn convulsively, rubbed his eyes, red-rimmed, and stared, unbelievably, at finding himself where he lay.

"**P**RETTY tough, old-timer," commented Jack.

The man groaned and held his head in pain.

"First night I failed to come home in twenty years. What'll my wife say?" he muttered.

"That wasn't your fault altogether: You were doped. You'll forget that when you feel in your pockets."

The other instantly reached for his hip pocket, then, frantically, went through his clothes. Following the realization of being cleaned, he started to swear a blue streak, awakening Will Galloway.

The score or more of victims began to come to a dazed consciousness, one by one, sick and shuddering with cold, and quickly aware of their individual losses.

Shortly they gathered in an indignant group, comparing notes. Though residing on various R.F.D. routes, well away from town, they knew one another by name and reputation. The last, often gained for shrewdness,

would always bear now, for those in the know, something of a stain. Bitter and galled by what had happened to them, none of the men had anything to offer save vague if terrifying threats of revenge.

"Now listen to me," demanded Jack Horton, in a tone of authority. "You fellows were fooled into carrying unusually large sums of money on your persons; you were shown a good time, then doped and robbed. But what are you going to do about it? The circus is gone, and your seeming to be drunk as lords kills any testimony you might bring."

"We're respectable citizens," said some one sheepishly.

"Sure, and that's what they counted on. But if you really want revenge, that's a different story. We hate the Estang outfit more than you do, and with a better cause. We aim to strike a decisive blow when we get the necessary backing.

"Now, gentlemen, I want all your names and addresses—that is, if you'll go to some lengths to get back at the crooks that roped you in?"

There was an angry murmur of assent, harsh and vibrant, from the red-eyed, rumped group of dupes. They started to give him the information he wanted in chorus, and Jack had to call a halt, and take down their names, and where they could be reached, one at a time. Then he slipped the pencil and paper in his inside pocket.

"You'll hear from me, never fear, when the time comes," he assured them.

Slowly they started to separate and scatter.

Jack turned to his companion.

"I think we've earned some breakfast, Will, by this morning's work. What do you say?"

"That the meal is on me," murmured the fixer.

CHAPTER VIII.

STRATEGY.

CAMPING out under the stars was an event marked "One night only" by the two conspirators.

"I'm getting too old to act like a Boy Scout," declared Jack Horton, whose neck felt as if placed on a rusty hinge. "After this we'll leave an early hotel call and speed out to add to our list of victims."

"All right. Now let me in on your plan."

"I'm taking your job as a fixer away from you for the present. You know the local attacks of natives on the circus. Attacks always bring the old yell of 'Hey, Rube!' and roustabouts with tent stakes come to the rescue. The farmers are always repulsed. Why? Because they've been unbalanced fits of resentment, without organization."

"I intend to focus the anger of the jaspers, from a number of towns instead of one, and direct it all at once upon the Estang gang, picking on a single stand."

Will's eyes opened wonderingly.

"Gee, that's something that's never been done!"

"System, my boy, system; the banner cry of big business, from bootlegging to bank wrecking. I understand you have a few bright ideas up your sleeve?"

"Yeah, and they can coincide with yours. When do you intend to pull the smash?"

"I think we'll need three weeks to get a large enough battalion of revenge. At the rate of a score or so per

town, in that time we'll have over four hundred farmers out for blood to call upon. Can you find the Estang play date that far in advance?"

Will thought deeply for a few moments. "I think I have it. I'll brace Dan Estang this afternoon."

A hearty breakfast finished, Will checked out of the hotel. The best bet was a trolley, which got them into Toulenville before one o'clock. This town was on the Horton Circus route later in the season. After checking in at a local hotel and walking with the fixer to the lot, Jack lost sight of him.

Will rejoined him a half hour later while he stood in front of the ballyhoo stand listening to the spieler, and drew him aside.

"I ran a wise wire on Dan Estang," Will said, smiling cynically. "Told him I had a third member of my mob, now on the coast, I intended to send for. On his arrival I'd raise the ante for protection to one hundred and fifty bucks a week. But my party must have time to clean up his business before hopping on. I'd give him three weeks; where would we be? He fell like a house afire. Tenaran, on the thirtieth of the month."

"Another one of our good stands," commented Jack ruefully. "Well, old-timer, you lied yourself proud. Tenaran will be the date for our attack. Paste that in your hat."

"I will."

"What's to-morrow's stand?"

"Merton."

"Just outside Walling—where we play. I'll slip away after the afternoon let out and have a talk with my father. Must have him in the know, and get him to arrange for dough to keep going. Three weeks is a long time to the tune of constant losses."

The other nodded agreement.

"Tell Pop Horton to hock his shirt. He will get it back all right."

"That's just what I intend to tell him," said Jack seriously.

THE following day, after the matinée, Jack took a trolley line to Walling. He was tired from that morning before dawn call to which he and Will had responded, but also he was elated. Twenty-two more names were added to the list of the robbed and duped who would go a long, long way for revenge.

Jack found his father just about to enter the cook tent. Their greeting was a warm one.

"Check your appetite a bit, dad. This is my only chance to see you."

They crossed to a quiet spot by the ticket entrance. Jack related how he was starting to gather, in town after town, names and addresses of victims who could be banded together into a weapon of retaliation.

"April thirtieth is the date, and Tenaran the town, where we give 'em the works. You must, at all costs, hold on until then."

The owner looked desperate.

"This constant hammering is getting us," he muttered.

"Then call our lawyer, Pelton, on long distance and tell him to query the First National on a big ninety-day note; you're good for it. Also have him put through a first mortgage on our home."

Jack's voice quavered. "It's the only way, dad. I realize we've held our heads high because of never going into debt; but an occasion for it has arisen. We simply must hold on."

"You are right, lad," said Pop Horton, who looked as if he aged ten years. "I'll do what you say. Howell of the

First National always kidded me about never holding any of my notes."

"After Pelton has put through the necessary papers and received them back from you with signatures, have him come on and travel with the show. I am sure we will need him."

"O. K. I'm letting you handle this."

"I don't think you will regret it. How's business?"

"The figures would only sadden you. But two circuses the same day, less than twenty miles apart, must also hurt Estang."

"It does, a bit; but he depends on his own racket and the intake from privileges for his big intake. We suffer most, being on the level. Grift has made Dan Estang the main guy; brother Warren handles the performance, as head ringmaster, and Stewart is contracting agent, but what Dan says goes. Now that this is right with you I'm going to hurry back. I don't want anything to slip up."

He patted his father on the back, more shocked than he cared to admit by how the opposition's tactics had aged him.

"Tell Ned Pelton to go to General Delivery in every town for mail. I'll have some instructions for him."

CHAPTER IX.

"HEY, RUBE!"

THE thirtieth of April was Jack Horton's objective. To further that day's offensive he and Will arose each morning before dawn was pink in the east, proceeded to the abandoned lot, and added to the secret list of farmers who might be called upon for a mission of revenge.

On the twentieth the younger Horton stole away for another brief visit

to the home show for a conference with the family lawyer, Ned Pelton. Because of lack of direct proof, no criminal charges could be brought against the Estang outfit. The attorney, however, was otherwise primed for action. Pelton was a well-known figure at the bar in the State, having once been a fighting district attorney, and could be listed as a valuable ally.

On April 26 Jack rented a typewriter and wrote duplicate letters to all the embittered farmers on his list. Each victim was told to leave his home, by machine, early enough to put in an appearance at a little hamlet called Devon, a mile north of Tenaran, on the afternoon of the thirtieth, before five o'clock. Sons, male relatives, close friends, or hired hands who could be trusted to assist might be added as reinforcements. A large proportion of the men were instructed to bring along axes or hatchets, the remainder to come armed with shotguns. A quick raid was to be made on the Estang Brothers' Circus. Absolute secrecy was demanded.

The morning of the awaited day of days Jack and Will slept late. Nearly four hundred men had been notified to gather. Just how many would answer the call and bring others along was, of course, a question.

Upon their arrival at Tenaran, at two o'clock, on an accommodation train, Jack and Will parted. The fixer had some business of his own to attend to. For an hour he waited at city hall and then was closeted with several mysterious individuals from the State capital. They left the building seemingly well satisfied with his information.

Before the hour of four Jack Horton left the dusty circus grounds, walked briskly back to Tenaran proper

and then north to the little Hamlet of Devon.

But 'already cars were coming in, mostly dilapidated tin lizzies, loaded down with farmers, in hunting or working clothes, ready for action.

Acting as a regulator of traffic, Jack directed the drivers toward an old baseball park lot. Before five o'clock the machines were parked rows deep, and a mob of husky men, hardened with farm work, gathered. Their number he estimated as something between five and six hundred, much nearer the last figure.

Dusk was falling as Jack's watch pointed to five o'clock.

He found an old soap box and, lugging it to a spot near second base, jumped on the impromptu platform to be above the crowd.

"Men, you don't know whom I am, but I shall tell you now. I'm Jack Horton of the Horton Circus, an outfit many of you first saw when you were kids. We've toured this State for over twenty years; our show's a home-grown product and this neck of the woods has been proud of it."

He swiftly related the dastardly tactics to which his circus had been subjected.

"Our motive, men, is mutual. We want to get back at the Estang aggregation. Some of you have come a long way with that object in view."

There was a deep growl of assent.

"My plan is a simple one. At six thirty the entire Estang working staff as well as the kinkers will be eating in the cook tent. Those of you I've asked to come armed with shotguns will surround it. The Estang force will be penned in and must stay that way, while the rest of this army attacks stake ropes, side poles, center poles, equipment, and canvas with axes and

hatchets. In twenty minutes, or less, every tent, except the cook tent, should be down and in ribbons, incalculable damage done. The show won't be able to move for weeks, and that means ruin!"

He was answered by a roar of approval.

"Half an hour after the attack you'll beat a hasty retreat and pull out for home in all directions. In another thirty minutes every car should be miles away from town. Any one here have a better suggestion to offer?"

None was brought forward. Arrangements were made for machines to be parked at four different points, a few minutes' walk from the circus lot, and Jack swung on the running board of one of them, driven by a farmer intent on his revenge.

AN air of quiet and calm brooded over the deserted midway, and about the tents pitched on a wide plain the lull that comes with supper time on the show.

The only sounds came from the cook tent; behind it curling smoke arose above traveling kitchens.

Quiet little groups of two and three men advanced on this tent from all sides, surrounding it; and then the ring steadied, and the watchers stood firm, shotguns held sloping forward.

Faint light gleamed on the blades of hatchets and axes, as other stealthy farmers took positions about the big top, menagerie top, and the kid show.

There will always be a dispute whether a signal was given. Jack Horton afterward said he made no sign to the little army of retribution, but the destruction of circus property seemed to snap into being instantaneously, the rip and tear of canvas drowned by the crash of splintering, falling poles.

Guy ropes gave way first, then side poles were sundered by sharp steel; canvas billowed and flattened, to be hacked into shreds by swinging ax and hatchet.

As the big top collapsed like a monster balloon that had been punctured, shrill cries arose from the cook tent.

The alarm was given. A deep bellow went up, the old circus rallying cry of "Hey, Rube!"

Instantly, from the cook tent entrance, issued a stream of sturdy, wild-eyed roustabouts.

"Get back, or we'll pepper you with lead," yelled a guard.

The boss canvasman, a figure of authority, pushed a path through his razorbacks and approached the foremost farmer.

"Are you John Law?" he growled, truculently.

"No, just an honest man swindled by you crooks!"

As he poked the barrel of the shotgun at the other's stomach the canvasman grabbed it, and the farmer pulled the trigger, but the exploding charge went high in the air between them. The next moment the weapon was wrestled from his hands and thrown to the ground.

"Wham!"

The boss canvasman let loose a haymaker, nearly from the ankle, and caught the disarmed farmer squarely on the button. He sagged, eyes bleary, out on his feet.

"Rush 'em, fellows," bellowed the canvasman, and he charged another enemy, his arms threshing right and left. His onset started the rush, while roustabouts crept, at different points, from under the oval tent, tackling guards around the legs. Guns were discharged and there were cries of pain and anguish from wounded men; then

the farmers threw aside their firearms and met their opponents man to man.

Quickly the guards were outnumbered three to one, but in the free-for-all fight that followed the circus men took plenty for what they gave. Everything went. The roustabouts were past masters of gouging, kicking, and "givin' 'em the knee," but they were up against strong men used to hard work, and whose every blow had years of outdoor labor behind it.

Jack Horton had waited in the mid-way for the lawyer, Ned Pelton, but developments drew him to the scene of action on double time. Yelling for reinforcements he swept into the mêlée. His directions were being followed all too literally. He had counted on the display of firearms preventing a fight, but they proved little more than a gesture. The major portion of the farmers were heartily finishing up their job of making a waste of ribbons out of fallen canvas, and kindling wood of tent supports; others swung at wagon spokes, and overturned the vehicles. They'd been told to destroy, and their minds were single tracked, bent on obtaining their own justice.

WHILE the fight was going against the cook tent guard of about ninety men, their resistance was giving the main body precious time in which to work. Dark, bloody figures reeled back from the circus men's onslaught; others sprawled in the sawdust where they had fallen.

Jack fought like a wildcat, yelling: "Farmers to the rescue! Farmers to—"

A fist caught him flat on the mouth, splitting his lips, staggering him. He swung for the roustabout, an upper cut which landed a glancing blow. Following that he plastered the fellow with

lefts and rights that made a smear of his face. Jack was tasting blood now, and looking for Dan Estang, who he expected would be in the thick of the fray.

He need not have worried.

Inside the cook tent that circus leader was not idle. He was starting a bucket brigade, leading from the traveling kitchens. Pails brimming with steaming hot liquid were filled at the thirty gallon caldron where water was boiled for coffee. Passed from hand to hand, they reached the tent entrance.

"Clear away, clear away from the rubes!"

Estang's voice rang above the curses of the trampling mob.

His men fell back, and buckets of scalding water, fast as they came, were thrown at the invaders. Shrieks of agony and torture rent the air, and men ran, screaming like animals in pain. The ring was effectively broken and a cry of triumph went up. Three hundred canvasmen, razorbacks and teamsters were now in the open, some bruised and dripping blood, but all now set for the clean up.

Jack Horton stumbled away with the rest, swearing bitterly. The circus was winning! That thought only was in his mind. He did not see the other farmers coming—coming in all directions, their work of ravage over, an army of farmers five hundred strong.

They swarmed from the other tents in broken lines, armed with hatchets and axes, and met the mass of circus men on three sides with an impact like the grind of bones. In ten seconds enemy from enemy band could not be distinguished in that swaying, shouting mob that swayed drunkenly as arms worked like pistons. The mob swayed backward toward the cook tent and with a rending sound it went

down, falling on kinkers and wind-jammers, and ending that bucket brigade then and there.

Now the tent was cut and ripped by the show folks themselves in their panic to get from under. The battle raged on in a confusion that told little, till a body slumped to the earth, or a man tottered out of the press to nurse his hurts.

Slowly and surely numbers told, for the circus men were now outnumbered five to three. Maybe it might be laid to that, or to the use of the flat end—mostly—of axes and hatchets; but probably more credit can be given to the bitter, long-brewing cup of revenge the farmers were now tasting in full measure.

As their first furious anger, instead of dying away, seemed to become intensified, the tide turned against the show folks. They weren't fighting for Estang now, but for self-protection, to own whole skins.

Somehow Jack Horton found himself on the edge of the conflict. His eyes swept the lot, the scene of wreckage. Now was the time for a triumphant retreat. But how could he spread that order among men in the blood zest of inflicting punishment?

TO Dan Estang had come a sudden fear. His command was passed along the line.

"To the cars, men. Fight your way to the cars!"

He figured, after the damage done here, the trains would be the next to get the brunt of the attack. And it was the cars that must take them out of town. What was left of equipment could be loaded later in the night.

As his order was understood, a battering ram composed of close-joined circus men forced through the center

of the farmers' army and retreated down the midway, heading for the railroad yards.

Jack Horton took advantage of this, running here and there, calling off any flank movement on either side of the phalanx of showmen. They marched away, leaving the hospital cases strewn on the ground behind them. As Jack saw Dan Estang at the head of the front row, pale and desperate, his hair tumbling over his forehead, Jack knew that his enemy had played right into his hands.

He tried to laugh, but his split lip hurt too much. There would be time enough for that; now a task was before him. It was a tribute to his tact that, in ten minutes, he was able to accomplish the dispersal of the farmers, who were persuaded to make their way, some leading, others carrying their wounded, to their cars. For them a memorable day of revenge was over, and that last glance at the lot, looking as if a cyclone had struck it, was the final satisfying draught of triumph.

Then it was that Jack Horton caught sight of Ned Pelton, his lawyer.

"All set, Ned?" he asked.

"Yes, Dan Estang was served with papers as he went in to dinner. Put 'em in an inside pocket without reading. Our attachment for one hundred thousand dollars to cover our damage suit; and he'll have to put up that amount, for bond, in order to get his outfit out of the State. Notices are slapped on his cars, and the I. M. & M. notified not to pull the circus trains out of town."

Jack chuckled.

"And Will is waiting with his surprise."

"Yes? I wondered where he was."

"Down at the cars, with a batch of

Federal prohibition dicks, ready to arrest Dan Estang for selling and transporting whisky. His private car is piled with cases."

"Well, let's go down and see how he takes our little proposition."

ESTANG was interviewed in his own car, under arrest.

"Ready to take your medicine, Estang?" Jack asked shortly.

The owner glanced up with a jerk of his chin, his nerves not under control.

"I've taken it," he muttered, harshly, "but what's that to you?"

"Oh, I'm Jack Horton," said the other lightly.

Dan Estang flinched and slowly surveyed the group about him, every face bearing an expression of hostility.

"I know when I'm beaten, gentlemen," he said in a low voice. "Facts are facts. I can repair the damage to my show, have new tents and equipment shipped on and pay on the dot. I can manage to fight this Federal charge, and pay a fine or serve time for it. But I can't get away with the two burdens if I'm forced to meet this hundred thousand dollar damage suit of yours by putting up that amount. You have me on my knees. There must be some terms that I can meet? Just ruining me can't be your object."

"You are right," admitted Ned Pelton, smoothly, "there are always terms for an armistice. Ours are hard ones."

"Give them to me, straight from the shoulder."

"You must put up a suitable bond to us, in the form of an agreement forfeiting ownership of your circus if it ever again is routed through the particular Northern States toured by the Horton Circus. That's the only condition under which the attachment will be lifted."

Dan Estang shrugged his shoulders. "Dig up a notary and I'll sign that paper. I own over fifty per cent of the stock. Really it isn't necessary, after this lesson, but I understand your demand for protection. We won't be in condition to fight opposition for a long, long time."

He smiled gamely.

"My general manager, Frank Crowley, will be out of the hospital tomorrow. He has an interest in this show. This will be some surprise to him; I hope it doesn't bring on a relapse."

"Sorry he wasn't here to-day," declared Jack politely. "If I don't get to see him, give Mr. Crowley Jack Horton's regards, and tell him I'm only sorry he missed the party."

THE END.





Stevens jerked up his arm and discharged his weapon

The Hawk of Hazard

Life was sudden and dangerous along the Southwestern frontier in ante-bellum days; nor was it made more peaceful by the lofty and deadly Southern chivalry of Allan Campbell, gentleman adventurer

By OSCAR J. FRIEND

Author of "It's a Bargain!" "The Photographin' Fool," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

ALLAN CAMPBELL, Mississippi gentleman, has been adventuring for several years with his enormous slave 'Tangle-eye. His deadliness with the pistol, his disregard for danger, and his extreme sense of gentlemanly honor have won him a wide but unfair reputation; all the river, in these ante-bellum eighteen-fifties, knows him as the Mississippi Hawk.

On the steamer bound to Belle Point,

Arkansas, he has a clash with Lieutenant Metclaff, who is jealous over Irene Claybourne's instinctive liking for the Hawk. Metclaff, deluded by the Hawk's reputation, thinks he catches him cheating; but Campbell spares the life of the well-meaning but madly hot-headed young cavalry officer by not challenging.

At Belle Point, the Hawk is met by Fred Ginter, pseudo-gentleman saloon

This story began in the Argosy for October 19.

owner, who has obtained Campbell's promise to start a horse race for him. Campbell had never met Ginter, nor had he understood, when he pledged his word to start the race, that he was promising to give Ginter's horse Ace-in-the-hole an unfair advantage over George Claybourne's Kentucky Girl. But his pledged word must stand.

Meantime, from the wilds of frontier Oklahoma, Ginter has imported a ruffian and killer named Purse Venier, to carry out various jobs for him. Purse, drunk and hating gentlemen like poison, swaggers into the general store of Matt Woodruff. Woodruff, Claybourne's brother-in-law and Irene's uncle, is a gruff, forthright frontier gentleman. In a hurry to meet the boat, he is stopped by Venier, who points his rifle and sneeringly demands that Matt serve him, in person.

CHAPTER V—(Continued).

UNCLE MATTHEW'S TEMPER.

"WAAAL, what in hell d'you want?" roared Matt angrily. Purse grinned. Then, catching sight of a block of cheese on the end of the counter, he pointed one dirty, broken-nailed finger at it.

"Gimme a pound o' cheese," he directed.

Matt glanced at the cheese and started toward it. The other moved along the front side of the counter with him. In practically the same relative position as regards each other they halted. Woodruff frowned about the counter in search of his cheese knife.

"Whack it off!" leered Venier.

"Charlie!" bawled Woodruff irritably. "Where'n heck's the cheese knife? I say, where's the cheese knife? Charlie!"

5 A

"Nev' mind Charlie," cut in Venier savagely. "You're waitin' on me. Look fer it yourself."

Woodruff glanced at the shelves behind him. Then he inclined his head, nearly losing his hat, and looked under the counter.

"It ain't here," he snapped quickly. "But since you're in such a hell-fired hurry all to once, I'll jes' shoot off a pound fer you."

And right under the menacing barrel of Venier's rifle he jerked a six-shooter up from under the counter and leveled it on the block of cheese. He laid his other hand on the stuff to keep it from jumping off the counter and pulled the trigger of his weapon, even as the other's gun barrel leaped up to cover his chest. In absolute indifference to the ruffian's firearm he calmly put five shots through the cheese in a vertical line.

Then, without laying down his gun, he tore off the half severed segment from the block and slammed it viciously down on the counter between them. In his surprise at the old man's unique method of cutting cheese, Venier had allowed his gun barrel to sag downward, content to watch the operation. Now, as the cheese was slammed down before him, the six-shooter of Woodruff was pointed directly at him.

"That's about a pound," stated Matt crisply. "Half a dollar—quick! An' this gun is a six-shooter, in case you don't know it. It don't miss fire, neither."

Venier, uttering a curse, made a frantic motion to train his rifle on the other and then saw the futility of such a move. He had been neatly trapped. Without a word he fished a piece of silver from a buckskin pouch he drew from his shirt and dropped it on the counter.

"Otto!" shouted Matt. "I say. Otto! C'mere an' take this blow-hard's guns. Hurry up, I'm late fer th' boat. Charlie! Come an' finish sellin' this customer. He needs somethin' else to go with his cheese an' he's got the cash to pay fer it. Charlie, I say."

The two clerks hurried forward to perform their appointed tasks. As soon as the first one had removed Venier's rifle and pair of six-shooters Uncle Matt thrust his own gun back under the counter and began rolling down his sleeves and struggling hurriedly into his coat. Henry rushed forward to assist him.

"Keep thet gun on 'im, Otto," instructed Woodruff briskly. "He's got a bowie knife under his clothes. When he buys five or ten dollars' worth o' stuff you can turn 'im loose. Unload his guns first an' then kick 'im out. Where'n tarnation's thet dang bill o' Jacquette an' Moore's. Henry! Where's thet bill?"

"In your coat pocket, sir," replied Henry, taking it out and handing it to the old man.

"Who in hell ast you to take it outa my pocket?" roared Matt angrily. "Git outa the way. Can't you hear the Olympic whistlin' fer the landin'?"

And he sprinted out of the store like a boy of twenty.

CHAPTER VI.

THE GENTLEMAN ADVENTURER.

CALMLY as usual, Allan Campbell stood at the side railing of the passenger deck and watched his fellow travelers disembark. The fact that but one passengerway was used doubled the length of time necessary for the traffic.

Then, with an interest that he was

not pleased to note in himself Campbell followed the figures of Irene Claybourne, her mother, and Lieutenant Metclaff as they moved to an isolated spot on the wharf where the two women flung themselves into the arms of a distinguished white-haired gentleman. After a moment spent in affectionate greeting it was obvious that the waiting Metclaff was introduced to George Claybourne, for both men bowed and raised their hats.

The sight of a long, rangy man in white linen trousers, black coat-tails flying behind him as he sprinted toward the group, now attracted the Hawk's attention.

So interested in the doings of this particular group had he been Campbell had failed to take note of the tall, mustached individual in black who had come aboard and inquired for him from one of the crew. Thus, the oily voice at his elbow was the first indication that another was near him.

"It seems that the Claybournes have prevailed on their military friend to stay over for the race Monday."

Campbell turned and surveyed the features of Fred Ginter.

"So?" he replied indifferently. "Is there to be a race here?"

Ginter's friendly smirk faded into an expression of astonishment. Then he laughed shortly, glancing quickly around him to make sure he wasn't overheard.

"I reckon there is," he murmured confidentially, "since you're here to start it. I am the man that hired you to start the race."

"I beg pardon, sir," returned Campbell courteously. "I have not the pleasure of your acquaintance. You are Mr. Fred Ginter?"

"The same," agreed Ginter jovially, slapping the Hawk familiarly on the

shoulder. "I'm the man who is paying you five hundred dollars to start my horse off ahead of Claybourne's filly. And, brother, that's all the start I need to beat."

"Brother?" Campbell said frigidly. "I was unaware that I had any relatives in this part of the country."

For a moment Ginter was taken aback. He flushed in quick resentment.

"Don't try any of that aristocratic stuff on me," he sneered faintly. "You're my hired man for five hundred dollars, it doesn't make a damn who you think you are."

"Sir," rejoined Campbell icily, "five thousand dollars does not entitle a stranger to slap me on the back and call me brother."

Ginter assimilated this in dead silence. By no means a coward, he yet did not take issue with his hired adventurer. Ginter was first of all a climbing schemer, second, a commercial person, and last of all a would-be gentleman. It would not do to antagonize Campbell at present; he needed him for awhile.

Hence, he swallowed his bitterness and smiled on the Hawk, an apologetic smile which did not inform the latter how much of an enemy he had just made.

"I beg your pardon, Campbell," he said gruffly. "I was merely trying to offer you a hearty welcome. I see you do not know the bluff ways of the West."

The Hawk unbent somewhat.

"Accepted, *Mr. Ginter*," he replied.

THEY left the boat, and Ginter pointed out a building. "There's the Dixie House just ahead of

us."

But Campbell did not look toward

it. He was watching the Claybourne family and Lieutenant Metclaff, who had evidently been persuaded to stay for the race, climb into a beautiful chaise drawn by a pair of fine horses.

"You are here solely to start a race *against* Claybourne's Kentucky Girl," said Ginter significantly. "Don't forget that, Campbell."

The Hawk glanced levelly at the speaker.

"So I gathered from a remark of yours on the boat, *Mr. Ginter*," he rejoined in studied accents.

Ginter met his gaze squarely. His lips parted in a faint smile which raised his black, trim mustache ever so slightly, granting a glimpse of firm, white teeth. For the first time Campbell got an insight into the deadly, wolfish character which lay behind the man's smooth exterior.

"Don't forget what I am paying you to do," repeated Ginter in a steely voice. "While my friendship seems undesirable to you my money evidently isn't. See that you earn it by keeping your word. You have promised to start this race—to start it for *me*."

"After what I have seen of you I don't believe it is your intention to insult me," Campbell replied slowly. "Is it?"

"No," began Ginter. "I—"

"Then, for the ease of your mind let me say that if I do not carry out my share of the agreement I shall refuse to accept a penny from you. I have no intention of failing you, though had I known what manner of man you were and what you meant by 'starting' this race, I would have refused to make a compact with you. But kindly refrain from mentioning the sum of money involved again."

"It seems to me," remarked Ginter threateningly, "that you are mighty

highflown for a professional murderer."

They stopped short in the wide doorway of the Dixie House and faced each other. Tangle-eye, patiently following them with a load of luggage which would have done credit to a small elephant, stopped also and waited without complaint for his master to move on.

"If you are calling me a murderer," said Campbell dispassionately, "you lie in your teeth. By taking reward for risking my life in other countries, under foreign flags, I would be called an adventurer, a soldier of fortune. Just because I see fit to do the same thing while remaining in my own country does not alter my status. You will retract that epithet or you will not walk a step from this threshold."

The wolf in Ginter's nature showed plainly now. His face was twisted into a snarl of hate. He met the blazing blue eyes of his challenger fearlessly. Being a dead shot did not help the Mississippi Hawk now. Ginter himself was a dead shot at this point-blank range. And he was confident that he could draw his derringer as quickly as could Campbell.

"You fool!" he growled contemptuously. "I can pistol you at the same time. Even if my gun misfired, you are surrounded by men of mine. You would be riddled with bullets before I could fall to the ground."

"That is a matter of indifference to me," returned Campbell tersely. "Do you retract that remark?"

Ginter stared into those fiery blue eyes, the only speaking organs in an otherwise inscrutable face. He gasped in amazement. There was not the slightest doubt that the Hawk meant just what he said. No wonder his services were in such demand. He

was utterly indifferent to personal danger. Despite himself Ginter felt a measure of respect for this man who played his life as the stake against a few paltry dollars. Here was the most supreme gambler that Ginter had ever met—and a much more valuable man therefore.

"I—I apologize," the saloon owner said lamely. "You are too good a man to see killed. It would be senseless for us both to die over a trifle."

"Quite true," agreed the Hawk calmly, turning and surveying the interior of the Dixie House as coolly as though they had been merely discussing the weather.

It was a low-ceilinged room, paneled in oak and with heavy oak beams across the ceiling. Along one side was a long bar of mahogany beauty, on the far end of which set an ice machine for the making of absinthe drip. The tables and chairs were of massive oak, suitable for dining, wining, or gambling. About midway of the room an oak staircase led sharply, by means of two turns, to the region above.

GINTER showed him to a single room at the rear of the second floor. Campbell gave the interior a single glance. He did not enter.

"I have slept in worse rooms," he admitted coldly, "but not when there was a better to be had. Come, show me the best unoccupied quarters in the house."

"But, my dear Campbell," protested Ginter. "Don't be exorbitant in your demands. How can you expect—"

"I expect nothing," Campbell interrupted. "I have the habit of paying my own expenses wherever I go."

"Oh!" murmured Ginter. "In that case, come right this way."

With alacrity he led the way back

up the hall. He passed the staircase and walked to the front end of the house where the hall seemed to terminate in a dormer window overlooking the front entrance. Instead, the corridor turned at right angles to the right and led on for a space of ten feet where it ended in a single door. With a grandiose gesture Ginter opened the door and stood aside for his companion to enter.

"This is the best part of the house," he declared proudly. "Only the most illustrious visitors have occupied this apartment. Washington Irving stopped here once. It—"

One look sufficed for the Hawk.

"Its history does not interest me," he stated crisply. "I'll take it as it is. Do you mind sending word to my man to bring my things up here immediately?"

A vindictive gleam mingled with the flash of avarice in Ginter's eyes. Without batting an eyelash he calmly doubled the price of the rooms.

"The price is two hundred dollars per month," he said with an unmistakable hint in his voice that the Hawk could not afford it. "Fifty dollars by the week—European plan."

If the Hawk knew that he was being robbed he gave no sign of it. Ginter did not get the satisfaction even of a single comment on the extortionate charge.

"I said I would take it," he repeated distinctly. "Do you wish the cash in advance?"

He made a motion to reach for his pocket.

"No, no," interposed Ginter hastily. "I just wanted to prevent any misunderstanding."

"There seems to be one," answered Campbell biting. "I believe I asked you to see that my slave and my lug-

gage be sent up at once. At fifty dollars per week," he added significantly, "I shall expect the very best of service, landlord."

And he smiled faintly, a smile which there was no one to see, as Ginter furiously slammed the door.

CHAPTER VII.

CHALLENGE.

UNDER ordinary circumstances, with or without Campbell's consent, Ginter, as a good showman, would have capitalized his imported bad man's reputation to attract trade to the Dixie House. Now, because of Campbell's work as his starter, he did not wish his fame broadcast. But his desire for secrecy was frustrated, by two unrelated causes—Purse Venier and Lieutenant Metclaff.

Purse, ignominiously released at last by Matthew Woodruff's clerks, hurried back to the Palace to drown his disgrace. He up-ended the gallon jug and let the fiery contents gurgle down his throat long enough to excite the admiration of the hardened frontier bartender. Then, as he began reloading his emptied six-shooters, he began to talk, and as he talked he drank. In an astonishingly short time he had acquired a tremendous drunk, and a large audience. To them he expounded his hatred of la-de-da gentlemen, and his own untamed fierceness. He was far more dangerous than this Mississippi Hawk who had arrived on the steamboat; his deeds overshadowed Allan Campbell's. Soon, none of his listeners were ignorant of the Hawk's fame.

But it was Lieutenant Metclaff who pieced two and two, and arrived at the realization that the Hawk was Fred Ginter's starter. At once he told Clay-

bourne, and any one who would listen, all he had heard about Allan Campbell.

Before night, Allan Campbell was as thoroughly advertised as though he had employed the not-yet-invented press agent. Ginter learned of the widespread rumors after it was too late to stop them. The only happy feature was that Campbell himself, having remained in the Dixie House, had not yet heard of the stories being circulated; nor did Ginter intend he should. Gone were the hotel man's chances of social recognition through the race; there only remained the satisfaction of beating the confounded Kentucky Girl and winning Claybourne's money. He had a score to settle with all of them—Claybourne, Metclaff, Venier, and the supercilious Hawk. Mr. Ginter had a long memory and a proportionately short conscience.

As the Hawk sat with him, that Saturday evening, before the great fireplace of the Dixie House, he was too keenly observant not to realize that he was an object of attention. Gentlemen all who patronized the Dixie House, there was not a whisper of the gossip which had quickened the town. No one stared rudely at Campbell, no one claimed his attention, no one avoided him. Nevertheless, he was the center of attraction and he knew it, to his annoyance.

"THERE are churches in this town, Mr. Ginter?" he asked suddenly.

"Oh, yes," nodded the other. "Three of them—Methodist, Baptist, and Catholic."

"No Presbyterian?"

"No. Why do you ask?" demanded Ginter in surprise.

"I always attend church on Sun-

day," responded the Hawk quietly. "My people are Presbyterians. If you will give me a general lay of the land I believe I will take a stroll and locate the Methodist church to-night."

"The church is only a few hundred yards from here," he quickly assured Campbell. "Laurence Stevens, a gentleman who lives here in the house, goes every Sunday morning. I'll introduce you and you can go in company. Stevens is a son of one of the earliest families here. He is the owner of our largest cotton gin."

Stevens was the very man for the task of shepherding the Hawk. Would he do it? Ginter smiled to himself. He knew that the gin operator would do exactly as the saloon owner told him. "Please don't leave, Campbell," he pleaded. "I was in hopes you would join me in a rubber of whist to-night. I seldom find good players. We can withdraw to one of the vacant alcoves where we will be undisturbed."

Campbell glanced at him in indecision. Ginter seemed to be exerting himself to entertain. Campbell could be no less courteous. Without doubt Ginter did have a hard time finding good whist players. Men who would play with him preferred dice or poker.

When Campbell assented, Ginter did not guess it was because he had touched a faint chord of pity in the Hawk's breast. He had no idea that this icy, inscrutable man was capable of pity, for he himself was not.

Ginter soon appeared with two men, Payne and Stedman; they repaired to an unoccupied alcove and the play commenced. The stakes were very small, merely enough to lend spice to the game. They had been engaged less than an hour when Howell, the manager of the Dixie House, entered and murmured something in Ginter's ear.

"Crouder?" said Ginter aloud. "All right. Find Laurence Stevens and bring him here right away."

In a few moments the man returned with a middle-aged gentleman in tow. Ginter arose and introduced the newcomer to Campbell. The others seemed to be well acquainted with the gin operator.

"I want you to take my hand, Stevens," Ginter explained. "I am called away. I wanted you to meet Mr. Campbell to-night, anyway. I told him that you would be glad to take him with you to church in the morning. I'll be back in time to see you gentlemen before you break up the game."

Stevens hesitated. At once Ginter flashed him a glance. He all but shoved the gin owner down into his seat.

"You're to keep your eye on Campbell until the race," he hissed in his ear. "See that he hears nothing of what's being said about town. Refuse—and you know what will happen."

A look of despair and impotent hatred filled Stevens's eyes for an instant and then was gone. He accepted the allotted task without speaking. At first he was rather stiff and diffident in his bearing as he studied the Hawk. The latter returned the appraisal with interest.

Stevens was a quiet-mannered, soft-spoken man, obviously a gentleman. He was clean-shaven and wore glasses. His face was pleasant in cast, but there were heavy lines that denoted care and his eyes had a worried, harried expression. To Campbell he seemed like a man on the brink of disaster.

AT Stevens's request the game was changed to poker. At once he began playing with a reckless abandon that rivaled that of a profligate spendthrift and gambler. He con-

tinued to drink steadily and to plunge heavily when it was Campbell who played for the pot. It was noticeable that he did not fight against the other two men in the game. Thus, it was the Hawk who steadily won all of his funds. Campbell tried to quit the game, but Stevens would not hear of it. The Hawk understood that there was a reason for the fellow's extravagant recklessness, but he could not fathom it.

The answer came suddenly, without warning. At precisely eleven o'clock Stevens shoved out the last of his funds to call a bet of Campbell's, and laid down three deuces against Campbell's flush. The latter made no attempt to rake in the pot he had won. Neglected, the heap of chips lay in the center of the table while Stevens rose unsteadily to his feet and turned his pockets, one after the other, inside out. Then he laughed: It was a desperate laugh. There was a queer, wild gleam in his eye. Campbell stared at him.

"I've been stripped," he said suddenly, an unmistakable sneer entering his voice. "That's what I get for playing with a card cheat and a hired murderer."

He faced Campbell defiantly, his hands at his sides. There was an audible gasp from the other two men. Not only had Stevens violated all the ethics of a clean game, but he hurled out that which the meanest gentleman in the house had not dreamed of saying.

The face of the Hawk became set and rigid. Slowly the blood receded from his lean cheeks. His eyes never left Stevens's face. That the insult cut deeply was obvious. This was the second time this particular epithet had been hurled into his face.

"Well?" shouted Stevens, unable to endure the strain of waiting. "Don't you resent insults?"

Campbell spoke.

"For some reason that I fail to understand," he said concisely, "an unenviable reputation has preceded me to this town. What do you mean, sir, by that remark?"

"What I said," replied Stevens hysterically. "If you resent it, why don't you draw a pistol and shoot me down?"

"Why don't you?" returned Campbell softly. "If you believe what you just called me to be true and you must know what it means to insult me. Why don't you draw and shoot? Have you no pistol?"

For an instant Stevens blinked at him. Then, with a clumsy attempt to denote haste, he jerked a derringer from his pocket, anxiously watching the Hawk for a similar movement of lethal activity. But by the time he held his weapon in his hand Campbell had not moved.

"Well?" inquired the Hawk crisply. "Why don't you shoot?"

"I—I can't shoot an unarmed man," gasped Stevens painfully. "Why, in God's name, don't you draw?"

For answer Campbell made an imperceptible movement of one graceful hand. In his grip there appeared the menacing steel of a heavy percussion, single-shot pistol.

"I have drawn," he said quietly. "Will you apologize?"

"Never!" declared Stevens vehemently.

"Very well. Perhaps you prefer a duel to a gun brawl such as this?"

"This will do."

"Very good, sir. If you do not fire before I count three, these two gentlemen will absolve me of the possible charge of murder. One! Two! Three!"

Stevens jerked up his arm and discharged his weapon at a spot far over

Campbell's head. The latter sat unmoved. He had not stirred. Now he merely smiled a cold smile that froze Stevens's vitals.

"AS I thought," he stated. "You are trying to throw your life away and preferred to be shot by another than to take your own life. But why did you pick on me?"

Stevens slumped into his chair. His pistol dropped unheeded to the floor. Then he bowed his head on his arms and gave way to hysterical sobbing.

Campbell glanced at the two witnesses of this amazing scene through the haze of powder smoke.

"Gentlemen," he asked, "leave us for the present, if you please. Say that a pistol fell to the floor out of Mr. Stevens's pocket and was accidentally discharged. Let no one enter."

The two men, murmuring an acquiescence, complied with his request. Campbell was left alone with the gin owner. He sat considering for a few moments, studying the top of the other man's head. Then:

"You are the second man in succession to insult me in a card game, Mr. Stevens," he said slowly. "While I am just beginning to have a faint understanding of the other man's motive I know that yours cannot be the same. Come. Tell me, why did you do it?"

He waited for answer. Finally Stevens raised his head and surveyed him out of haggard eyes.

"I—I thought you'd shoot me," he replied hoarsely. "Almost any man would have."

"Perhaps. But why did you want me to do so?" Campbell went on patiently.

"Why? You ask me why? Because I think death is the only way out of trouble for me. I thought you

would be just the man to accommodate me. Instead, despite the fact that you are hired by Fred Ginter, you are a gentleman. I owe you an apology—a public apology.”

Campbell made a deprecatory gesture.

“Instead of apologizing, suppose you tell me what the trouble is?”

Stevens eyed him for a moment. Then he laughed bitterly.

“Why not?” he shrugged. “Payne and Stedman will spread this story, anyway. You think I own the cotton gin, you think I am a gentleman! I am less than penniless. Fred Ginter has me mortgaged hand and foot. I am utterly in his toils. And he is forcing me to do his filthy bidding and cheat my friends and customers in a thousand dirty ways. I have been sinking deeper and deeper for three years. And to-night he had the colossal nerve to attempt to make a mere watchdog out of me. He thinks he owns me now, that I must do anything that he demands. I realized that I had reached the bottom. It is best for me to die. But I can’t even die successfully. I can’t leave here and desert my family. My mother and sister are dependent on me.”

“Then you cannot die, either,” said Campbell firmly. “Do you mean that Ginter really directs your business and robs the planters for whom you gin?”

Stevens laughed grimly.

“Exactly,” he answered. “But I am the nominal head of the business. If anything goes wrong I will be the sacrifice.”

“WHAT do you mean, that he was trying to make a watchdog out of you to-night?”

“To watch you. I was to stay with you all day to-morrow. Why, I don’t

know yet—unless it was to keep you from hearing what is being rumored about you.”

“And what is being rumored?”

“I’ve already told you in my insult.”

“Ahhhh!” breathed Campbell softly. “And do you know where this rumor might be coming from?”

“As I understand it, from the young soldier who is visiting the Claybourne family. He is trying to keep George from racing Kentucky Girl against Ginter’s horse with you as starter.”

“As I suspected,” murmured Campbell. “Do you mind telling me to what extent you are in debt to Ginter?”

“If I had fourteen thousand dollars I could be quit of him,” Stevens replied. “I might as well wish for the moon.”

“Perhaps not,” said the Hawk gently. “Suppose you say nothing of this talk to any one for the present. To-morrow you and I can find a more suitable spot to discuss matters. I am leaving on the table here all my winnings. I shall ask Payne and Stedman to come in as I go to my rooms. It is up to you to stop their mouths. In the meantime, I will look forward to attending church with you in the morning.”

“Do you mean that it is your intention to help me?” Stevens asked tremulously.

“If it is within my power,” admitted Campbell, thoughtfully. “Good night, sir.”

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MOMENTOUS RACE.

JOBE’S FIELD, a level meadow of some twelve acres in extent, lay just northwest of the town, a scant hundred yards above the point where Purse Venier had tied up his house-

boat. It was the town common. Barbecues, picnics, and rodeos had been held there. It was where Fred Ginter's racer had twice met defeat.

The third race between Claybourne's filly and Ginter's three-year-old was scheduled to take place in the early afternoon. Despite the fact that Belle Point was not, properly, a racing center the grounds were thronged with townspeople and others from miles around fully two hours before the race. The course, approximately nine hundred yards, had been roughly staked off around the field. The former races had consisted of two and three laps, averaging a mile or more. As Ginter had made all of the conditions for the present race, a larger track had been laid out and the horses were to make but one circuit, or a fraction more than half a mile. As the two animals were almost evenly matched the advantage in the getaway would undoubtedly give the race to the lucky entrant.

Speculation anent the outcome of the affair was rife. The rumors had spread all over the countryside. Now that the secret was out frantic men ran back and forth over the grounds seeking to withdraw their bets or to hedge them by making a counter wager. It was impossible to force a single retraction of bets because no statement had been made by either Claybourne or Ginter. Nothing was certain except the prevalence of the rumor. Impromptu bookmakers who were sure of the accuracy of the report were working among the sightseers, offering odds of two to one on Ace-in-the-Hole.

A temporary shed had been erected at one end of the field for the horses, and a ring of guards kept back the crush of the crowd, while adherents of each faction kept faithful watch over the two racers. The sight reminded

Campbell of an old time camp meeting down on the delta.

The Hawk did not go near the spot until nearly time for the race. Then, in company with Laurence Stevens, he put in his appearance. At once he was pointed out by hundreds of people as the storm center. He became the cynosure of all eyes as he made his way toward the little stand which had been erected at the starting point. Impervious to the stares of the multitude he presented himself to Fred Ginter, who was awaiting him. Stevens, his task at an end, melted into the crowd.

What thoughts were passing through the Hawk's mind were unknown. Thanks to Stevens, Campbell had become thoroughly aware of the entire situation in which he found himself. That he wished himself a thousand miles away nobody knew. That he had no intention of breaking his word and backing out of his agreement no one knew better than he himself. While he had plumbed the depths of the saloon owner's evil character, while he realized the fact that Ginter had not laid these dishonest details before him in hiring him, he firmly intended carrying out his pledged word, fraudulently obtained though it was. And afterward? Ginter should answer to him for it.

"Well, you're here," said Ginter briefly. "Come. I'll take you over to Claybourne."

He led the Hawk to the spot where the Claybourne carriage stood in the shade of an old elm. Claybourne and Woodruff stood beside the step talking together. Irene Claybourne sat in the vehicle conversing with Lieutenant Metclaff. Mrs. Claybourne had refused to come.

As Ginter brought Campbell to the group, Irene turned her shoulder and

hid her face with her parasol. She listened intently, however, to the conversation.

"Mr. Claybourne," spoke Ginter, removing his hat and bowing low to the girl in the carriage who did not see him, "this is Allan Campbell, the man who will act as starter for this race. Mr. Campbell is an expert on thoroughbred horses, and a man whose judgment is sure, and who is capable of enforcing his judgment. He has looked over both horses, and assures me that Kentucky Girl and Ace-in-the-hole are evenly matched. Mr. Campbell, Mr. Claybourne."

EACH man sized the other up critically. Both bowed without speaking. Campbell glanced expectantly at Woodruff, but Ginter went on talking to Claybourne. The Hawk was too reserved to say anything. Not so with Uncle Matt.

"What's the matter, Ginter?" demanded the old man bluntly. "Can't you see me? Sore about that Venier feller?"

Ginter flashed a hard glance at the speaker.

"You should have killed him," he retorted evenly. "You would have saved me the trouble."

"Mebbe I will yet," replied Matt calmly. Then he turned to Campbell. "My name's Woodruff, young feller. Howdy."

He held out his hand. Campbell, who was formally bowing, started erect and met the old man's gaze in faint amazement. Then, surprised, he accepted the proffered handshake and was astonished at the heartiness of the grip. A flame kindled in his fine eyes, a flame that met its responding glow in the judicial gray eyes of the other.

"There's been some talk about me

and Campbell," said Ginter to Claybourne. "I found out where it started, and I just want to tell you that the fellow is a liar. Maybe you'd like to call off the race, though?"

There was an angry exclamation from the carriage, and a very furious young cavalry officer leaped to the ground.

"If you mean that epithet for me," he declared angrily, "*you* are the liar, sir."

They seemed to forget that the man they were discussing stood in their midst, as if he were an abstract issue for them to fight over, an effigy of a man who was incapable of resenting aspersions cast upon him. Woodruff grabbed the infuriated lieutenant by the arm.

"Here," he commanded harshly. "Hold your hosses, young feller."

"That is a sensible suggestion," sneered Ginter, falling back a pace and unbuttoning his coat. "I name no names, but if the boot fits you, boy, put it on."

Campbell's voice cut into the argument like a keen knife.

"I have no stomach for vulgar brawls," he said in utter disdain, addressing himself impartially to Ginter and Metclaff. "If you cannot behave as gentlemen in the presence of ladies you will have to excuse me."

This was his only reference to the presence of Irene Claybourne. He bowed and turned to withdraw.

"Stay!" said George Claybourne quietly. Then to his truculent guest: "Mr. Campbell is right, Metclaff. This is no place for quarreling. We are observed on every hand. Get back into the carriage, please."

Then he turned to Ginter.

"Sir, I have no objections to raise in the matter of this race," he said

coldly. "If there are no further details to be arranged, suppose you proceed?"

"Fair enough," agreed Ginter heartily. "As you've beaten my horse twice, it's natural for me to want a little revenge. I believe my horse will win to-day. How about you and me placing another little bet?"

"I do not conduct a racing stable," replied Claybourne with dignity. "I have already wagered five hundred dollars with you to cover the expense of training and laying out this course. That is more than enough to prevent the winner from being out any expense. And that, sir, remains the extent of my gambling."

"All right," laughed Ginter, bowing again to the girl in the vehicle. "I reckon there's no need waiting any longer."

He walked away with Campbell who stood waiting at one side. To avoid walking in his company, Claybourne remained at the side of his carriage for a moment before going over to the shed to see about his own entry. He spoke to his brother-in-law.

"That Campbell is as cold as an iceberg," he murmured.

"Yep," nodded Woodruff shortly. "An' jes' as dangerous if a body was to rile 'im. But he ain't easy to rile."

"Icebergs, Matt," rejoined Claybourne, "are not dangerous in hell."

Woodruff glanced after the figure of Campbell before looking at Claybourne. Then:

"I like 'im, George," he commented simply.

UNAWARE of this discussion, and indifferent had he known, Campbell bent his attention to the starting of the race. Carefully he chose the exact spot where he wished to

stretch the tape. This was some few feet away from the little stand at which Tangle-eye took up his position. Men started clearing the roped track of its human traffic. Amid shouts and cheers two grinning little negro imps in cottonade garments rode the two horses out of their respective stalls. In the most approved form they proceeded to jockey their mounts backward and forward until the animals were restless enough for a quick start.

Ginter approached his starter for a last word of advice.

"You are running this race, Campbell," he said curtly. "There's been some talk about the starting. You do what you're paid to do and there 'll be no trouble. I've got men stationed all around here."

The Hawk merely eyed the other coolly and then proceeded with his business. Ginter frowned at him for an instant and then withdrew to admonish the negro lad riding his horse.

At last, at a signal from the Hawk, the man Crouder climbed up into the little stand and addressed the crowd. Silence of a sort fell while he announced the race, the conditions, the judges, and the starter. Amid the senseless applause of the multitude he climbed down and made his way to the shed. Alone at the inner edge of the track Campbell stood with a white handkerchief in his hand.

Two false starts the pair of horses made, fretting the tense throng quite as much as themselves. Then, as they paced back to the shed for a fresh try at the crude barrier, a voice broke in on Campbell's ear. Without turning his head, never taking his eyes off the horses, he recognized the speaker. It was George Claybourne.

"Mr. Campbell, I am standing precisely five feet behind you with a pistol

pointed at your back," said Claybourne. "We are alone together at this particular spot, and it is not apparent to the folks all around us that I am armed as my weapon is in my pocket. Do you understand this?"

"Perfectly," Campbell said.

"Good," went on the planter in a deadily quiet tone. "Without any unnecessary motions you are to start this race as per schedule. However, if Kentucky Girl does not get away with a perfectly fair start, you will not live to see the finish of the race. I would regret sincerely to pistol a man in the back, but I want you to realize that such is my unswerving intention if you fail to do as I demand."

"Sir, this is *no tangle* to unsnarl at all," answered Campbell in a distinct, carrying voice. "You leave me no alternative."

Claybourne did not see how the immense negro, Tangle-eye, standing near the stand at one side, relaxed at the Hawk's words and leaned carelessly back against the structure. The planter had eyes only for the elegant figure before him.

"Such is my intention," Claybourne replied. "Remember that I stand here waiting."

The two horses came thundering down the track again. This time they were neck and neck just before they reached the point where the starter stood. Instantly Campbell swept his hand down with the fluttering handkerchief. The two jockeys leaned forward on the necks of their mounts, and the spirited animals leaped forward.

FOR an instant there was an amazed silence. Then a storm of cheers arose from hundreds of throats at the perfect fairness of the start. From the vicinity of the shed Fred Ginter

came across the inner field at a run. Others, sensing impending drama, streamed after him. They neared the two men just as Campbell tucked his handkerchief in his breast pocket and bowed to Claybourne.

"Does that satisfy you, sir?" they all heard the Hawk ask.

"Perfectly," responded Claybourne just as coolly, withdrawing his hand from his pocket and bowing quite as deeply. He straightened himself and continued in his most formal manner. "In the event that you yourself are not likewise satisfied, I shall hold myself at your service for any designated place and hour."

"To what purpose, sir?" replied Campbell, a faint smile on his lips. "A meeting would be futile now that it is too late to remedy the cause of our difference."

"Nevertheless, consider me at your command," retorted Claybourne. "A gentleman is entitled to some redress."

Campbell bowed without answering, and Claybourne returned to his carriage without once glancing at the men about him or at the now distant horses.

Ginter was unable to control his rage.

"Campbell, you've thrown the race," he snarled furiously. "What do you mean? What have you to say?"

"Nothing," Campbell said coldly.

"Do you think I'm going to pay you for such a stunt as this?" went on the saloon owner venomously.

"You and I severed relations with the sweep of my handkerchief," replied the Hawk coldly. "You owe me nothing."

"You're damn right I owe you nothing. I've a good mind to shoot you like a cur. You—"

"Hold on, Fred," cautioned Crouder keenly. "I believe Claybourne had

a gun on Campbell. We oughta thought of that."

"Did he?" demanded Ginter uglily.

"That, sir, is none of your business," was Campbell's reply.

"Ah, ha!" nodded Ginter smoothly. "So that's why all the talk of a duel. Well, what are you going to do about it? Are you going to stand for that kind of dirt?"

Queer the functioning of Mr. Ginter's conscience.

"I believe I said that we no longer have any points of contact," rejoined Campbell icily. "Good afternoon."

"You wait!" ripped out Ginter savagely. "I hired you to win this race, not to lose it. What do you think I went to all this expense for?"

"My services have cost you nothing."

"You've cost me one hell of a lot," snapped the other. "I believe you are yellow. Metclaff must have been telling the truth when he said you backed down before him. And I thought you were a man! You—"

Campbell's eyes were blazing.

"I must warn you," he cut in, his voice sharp and metallic, "that if you offer me one more insult I shall be compelled to pistol you where you stand."

The other men crowded around Ginter quickly, remonstrating with him. He quieted down.

"All right," he rumbled heavily. "But I'm not through with you, Campbell. No man throws me down and gets away with it. I'll be down to the Dixie House to see you later."

KENTUCKY GIRL finished the race a good length ahead of Ace-in-the-hole, coming down the home stretch as Claybourne rejoined his own party.

"Daddy," cried Irene, instantly, "what happened? We saw you go over to speak to that—that man, and before he turned around to enter into conversation he started the race—and started it fairly. Oh, what did you say to each other? You bowed as if you were in the ballroom."

"Likely Mr. Claybourne promised him a good thrashing if he cheated," said Metclaff with a short laugh. "I would have done just that."

And doubtless he would. But he had no idea how near the truth he had come in his remark. Irene, quickly apprehensive, perceived more than the young officer.

"Daddy!" she cried. "You threatened him! You forced him to betray his employer at the point of a gun, didn't you? Oh, don't shrug me aside. I know it, I know it! You've made an implacable enemy, for that man is no coward whatever else he may be. You were arranging a duel, weren't you? Dear God, it means your death. Oh, why did you ever promise to race Kentucky Girl?"

"Here," admonished her father sternly. "Control yourself, my darling. Nothing whatever catastrophic has happened. No duel was arranged. I doubt very much if I ever hear of the man again. There has been a lot of bugaboo over nothing."

Uncle Matt had not spoken during all this time. Now he cleared his throat for a comment.

"Reckon you're right 'bout Campbell not givin' you any trouble, George," he remarked to his cool brother-in-law. "But you was shakin' hands with it when you went up against 'im while ago. I don't reckon you seen the nigger standin' behind you. Campbell signaled him somehow to keep back. Otherwise I kinda fig-

ure there of been *two* icebergs in the devil's dooryard."

"What?" put in Metclaff imperiously. "Why, if that nigger had laid his hands on Mr. Claybourne they would have lynched him."

Matt Woodruff surveyed the hot-eyed speaker calmly.

"Yep," he agreed simply.

Then he pointed to the vast and mighty-thewed Tangle-eye who towered head and shoulders above the throng as he opened a way for the passage of his master across the common.

"Yep," he added succinctly, "they'd of lynched him—too late to help George. Waal, reckon I'll be gittin' on back to th' store."

CHAPTER IX.

ON THE FIELD OF HONOR.

AT seven o'clock the Claybourne household was astir. At eight breakfast was served. Tuesday morning was no exception, for Lieutenant Metclaff was not leaving for Fort Smith this morning, having been prevailed on by Mrs. Claybourne to remain until the next up-river steamboat.

The young officer was not loath to stay, for he hoped to have something to say to Irene, and in this hope he was supported heartily by Mrs. Claybourne. He had many admirable qualities, he came from a good family, and was above the necessity of marrying for money. On the other hand, Irene was fast approaching spinsterhood—she was all of twenty-two, she had finished her education, and was in the flower of young womanhood.

The prospect of Aunt Columbine's pancakes fairly made Metclaff ravenous with hunger. Indeed, the world

was a lovely, rosy place despite the gray morning skies.

Uncle Eben was laying fresh napkins on the table when Irene, Mrs. Claybourne, and Metclaff came down from the main house. There was no sign of Mr. Claybourne, and they had Uncle Eben sound the gong again.

"We won't wait for Mr. Claybourne," decided the hostess at last.

Breakfast began, the aged negro serving with the simple dignity which came only from years of association with his white folks. George Claybourne did not appear. They were just finishing the meal when Uncle Eben approached his mistress's chair with a troubled face.

"Mistus, Ah'se done sent Columbine's Annie down to de niggah quarters an' to de stables, but dey ain' no sign ob Marse Gawge. Nobody seed 'im leave de place."

Before nine o'clock the family was frantic. Slaves were dispatched to neighboring plantations to make inquiries. Uncle Eben himself rode to town to seek information. By ten o'clock the irritating puzzle had developed into a somber mystery. Matt Woodruff was summoned.

No one had seen Claybourne since daylight. His family had not seen him since he had retired at eleven o'clock the night before. He had vanished as mysteriously and as completely as though the earth had opened and swallowed him up.

"'Tain't natural," declared Woodruff impatiently. "George don't do nothin' 'thout a reason. As he went of his own free will an' accord th' only thing I can see is thet he took the stage-coach. Might be some mail—let's see George's papers. No harm in glancin' over his affairs."

Without further words Mrs. Clay-

bourne led her brother toward her husband's bedroom. Irene and Metclaff followed closely.

A fine old highboy of cherry wood which had a center panel to let down served Claybourne for a writing desk. His papers of importance were in neat array. One paper, rolled into a loose scroll, in the lowest center compartment of the desk, was the first one upon which Woodruff put his hand. As he drew it forth and unrolled it a square of cardboard dropped to the carpet.

He stooped and retrieved it. It was an elegant calling card. Across its face in beautiful script he read the name:

ALLAN MARION CAMPBELL

"Humph!" he grunted to himself. "Where the hell did that come from?"

He turned it over. On the back a message was closely written in a bold, legible hand. Curiously Matt began to read. Instantly his attention became riveted. His very attitude spoke so eloquently that the others fell silent and stared at him in wonder. He read:

Sir:

Upon mature thought, your action yesterday, when you had no reliable information by which to judge my intentions as starter for the race, was no less than an insult. I have the honor of holding you to your promise. Pistols—at dawn—MacNelly's Island. All details have been arranged. If you wish to make good your word, the bearer of this card will guide you to the selected spot.

This was all. There was no signature. None seemed to be needed. Quickly Woodruff snatched open the sheet of paper he held and stepped over to the window for the fullest light. He recognized the precise handwriting of his brother-in-law. This note was no

less brief and concise than the message on the back of Campbell's card.

In the event that my hand and eye should fail me this morning at dawn and I fail to see the sun rise I hereby appoint my brother-in-law, Matthew Woodruff, as executor of my estate. My papers are all in order and in this highboy with the exception of my will, which is in the safe of Judge Frisbie. I do not wake my wife and daughter to bid them good-by, as it is an ungodly hour, and I shall see them at breakfast. Be it understood that this duel is of my own making and that I fall at the hand of a gentleman of unquestionable honor.

GEORGE CLAYBOURNE.

Woodruff turned a dismayed face toward his companions. His sister caught at her throat and eyed him beseechingly, silently imploring him to speak. Irene rushed forward and clutched his arm fiercely.

"What is it, Uncle Matt?" she cried.

"My dear," he said in a hoarse voice, "your pa has been called away on sudden business. This here is jes' a note to me. I—"

"Give me that paper," the girl demanded, desperately calm. "Uncle Matthew!"

She seized the paper and, at her mother's whispered request, read it aloud. The older woman sank into a chair, overcome by the information. Quickly Metclaff grabbed a book and began to fan her.

"But—but with whom did he duel?" cried out Irene in anguish. "Was it—oh! It was the Mississippi Hawk! I feared it yesterday!"

"DO you understand what this means, Mr. Woodruff?" asked Metclaff as the two of them rode away.

"It means that there's two dead men

on MacNelly's Island," responded Matt grimly.

"It means that the Mississippi Hawk has run true to form," stated the officer in a hard voice. "Murder has been committed just as surely as you live, and I can name the assassin."

MacNelly's Island was a fairly large tract of land about halfway between the Claybourne plantation and Belle Point. It had once been a part of the mainland until the eroding action of the river as it swept around the bend ate a short cut across the jutting promontory. This had been years before. A settler by the name of MacNelly had tried to bring the island under cultivation, but twice a year the high water inundated the land, ruining crops and drowning stock. Discouraged, the man had given up the idea and had long since moved to parts unknown.

With so much available land to be had cheaply on the mainland no one else had attempted to cultivate this tract which was subject to spring and fall flooding. Willows and brambles had reclaimed it. It was isolated and uninhabited save for an occasional visit by exploring boys or used as a temporary tie-up by a houseboat or a raft. There were level spots toward its interior and its isolation made it an ideal spot for the furthering of a private quarrel. Matt Woodruff knew of at least two former occasions upon which it had been used.

Without wasting any time to inquire into the why and wherefore of the matter or any of its perplexing phases Woodruff ordered a thorough search of the island. It would be time to make inquiries later. Even with the assistance of Metclaff and a half dozen negroes from the plantation the early dusk was falling before he came upon that which he had feared to find.

Alone in a little clearing, prone on its back, lay the rigid form of George Claybourne. In his right hand was clasped a beautiful duelling pistol, the hammer home against an exploded cap. In the center of his forehead was a neat round hole. He was altogether alone. There was not so much as a scrap of paper in the clearing.

In truth George Claybourne had failed to see the sun rise, and in ruthless, cruel compensation therefore his slayer had left his sightless eyes to stare into the heavens and follow the path of the sun throughout the day.

And there it was that they found him, a faint expression of surprise on his face and the dew of coming night upon his pallid brow.

CHAPTER X.

THE DUELLING PISTOL.

CLAD in silken dressing gown, Allan Campbell sat brooding in his rooms Tuesday night. It was not over the money he had loaned Laurence Stevens to free him from Ginter, although this had stripped Campbell of almost all the cash upon which he could lawfully put his hands. Stevens was making out a mortgage on his holdings to give Campbell; and then the Hawk would return to the Mississippi at last.

With the one exception of Stevens, his entire trip into Arkansas had proved a colossal failure. Ever since his first meeting with Irene Claybourne on the Olympic everything had gone wrong. Worse than this, he had conceived a distaste for the kind of life he was leading. The thrill of adventure, of conquest, of gambling was gone. In its place was a restless unhappiness that he did not understand.

His thoughts were interrupted by an

authoritative knocking on the door. Tangle-eye bounded erect as Campbell motioned him to the door. Two men stood upon the threshold. One was Lieutenant Metclaff. The other was a corpulent stranger whose bulk rivaled that of the negro.

He was a hard-eyed man who was built on the generous lines of a hogs-head. His nose was large and straight, his lips a grim gash across his face. Under one massive arm was a small bundle.

"My name is Bruce," he announced tersely. "Sheriff o' this county. Are you Allan Campbell?"

The Hawk bowed in acknowledgment.

"To what do I owe the honor of this visit?" he asked coolly.

"This," said Bruce, unwrapping his bundle and holding forth an ornate duelling pistol. "Do you recognize it?"

Campbell eyed the pistol closely. It was a beautiful thing of chased silver mounting and carved black walnut stock with a silver butt finely engraved. It was graceful and slender with a seven and one-half-inch barrel deeply rifled and hexagonal in shape. Delicately balanced, it was a weapon of deadly precision.

"It looks a great deal like a pair of pistols I possess," said Campbell in a queer voice.

"You have a *pair* of duelling pistols like this?" pursued Bruce skeptically.

Campbell raised his hand at the negro in the background.

"My pistol case, Tangle," he said thinly.

The slave hurried into the other room and returned quickly with a flat, silver-mounted mahogany case. The Hawk placed it on the table and unlocked it with a key from his waistcoat

pocket. He raised the lid. Within was a complete outfit for the settlement of a gentlemanly altercation. A silver powder flask, a bullet mold for either round or conical bullets, a silver cap box, screw driver, and cleaning tool. There was one shortage. Only one pistol lay in its proper depression in the velvet-lined case. It was the mate to the gun held in the sheriff's hand.

Campbell started in surprise. He shot a glance at his slave. Then he smiled faintly and bowed to the silent Bruce.

"I beg to correct my statement," he murmured. "That weapon in your hand seems to be one of my pistols. May I ask where and how you obtained it?"

"Out of a dead man's hands!" retorted the sheriff grimly. "I arrest you for the murder of George Claybourne."

"What?"

Bruce repeated his statement.

"You astound me. I must demand an explanation."

"Humph! You're a cool one, all right," rejoined Bruce shortly. "Come along. I guess I'll just take that case along for evidence."

THE Hawk drew himself up and glared at the uncommunicative sheriff. Then he turned to Metclaff for the first time. The young officer had stood stiffly at attention since the moment of his entrance. He met Campbell's gaze with a hard eye.

"As one gentleman to another," said Campbell, "will you be so kind as to enlighten me on this matter, lieutenant?"

Metclaff's lip curled.

"It is an insult for me to be addressed as an equal by an assassin," he replied in a stony voice, "yet I will

answer your question. You have killed one man too many and we have the evidence of your crime."

Campbell drew back as though he had been struck a blow in the face. The blood receded from his cheeks and his eyes began to glow.

"Here, none o' that!" rasped Bruce, drawing his gun. "Get into your clothes."

The Hawk straightened himself haughtily.

Tangle-eye clenched his great fists. The muscles corded in his mighty arms. He growled in his throat. Reckless of the officer's drawn gun, he crouched like a gigantic ape.

"Yo 'ain't gwinta take Marse Allan," he snarled. "Go 'way, white man, an' leave us in peace!"

"Back, Tangle," commanded his master. "I am going of my own free will. You must stay here to guard my property. Some one has already robbed us."

The negro broke down in a fit of wild sobbing, but he drew back out of the way. Campbell dressed. He laid one hand on Tangle-eye's heaving shoulder, as he stepped quickly to the door. "Stay here till you get word from me, Tangle?"

All the way to the jail the Hawk preserved a stony silence. After a bit the sheriff began to thaw out.

"We've got the evidence on you, Campbell," he said conversationally. "A slick scheme o' yours, but you forgot that there was a soldier visiting here who knows all about firearms. Eh, lieutenant? How come you to leave your pistol in Claybourne's hand, Campbell? Something scare you away as soon's you killed him?"

The Hawk preserved a stern silence.

"All right," grunted the sheriff as he opened the door of a cell. "Think it over all night. The inquest will be held in the morning. You better decide to talk."

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT WEEK.

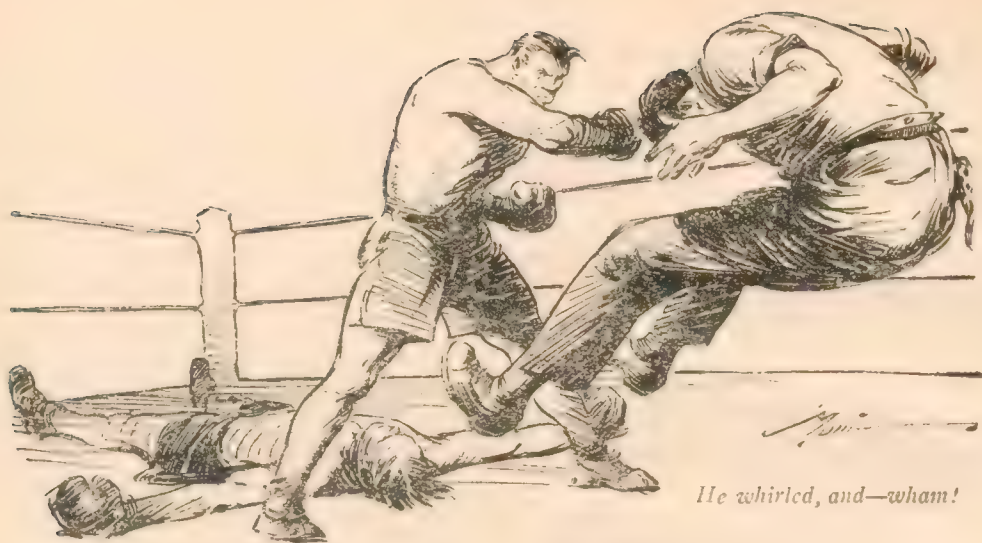


St. Jerome

ONE of the grimmest and most curious sights to be seen in Africa may be found in the museum of Mustapha Supérieur in the city of Algiers. There can be seen the plaster cast of St. Jerome in all his horrible death agony—the death agony of a man interred alive. The story tells that this St. Jerome was an apostate Arab who fell into the hands of Algerian pirates in 1569. To punish him for going Christian, the corsairs buried him alive in a block of concrete by flinging him into a mold and pouring the cement over his body. This block was then set into the walls of the Fort of Twenty-Four Hours, to be found three hundred years later when the French smashed the barricade and discovered the skeleton in the stone.

The ingenious French proceeded to pour plaster into the mold where the body had been trapped, and the result was an almost perfectly-formed statue of the martyr. It is a gruesome relic, but an amazing one, for the monk's tortured expression, the grim posture of his writhing body, the stamp of horror is captured in the model to tell a tale of the cruelty of days gone by.

Theodore Roscoe.



He whirled, and—wham!

Dirty Linen

Ram Trapp would as soon fight for the love of it as for a prize—which furnishes him and his manager plenty of excitement

By JOHN A. THOMPSON

RAMESES TRAPP was, I guess, the greatest battler I ever handled. In or out of the prize ring, that guy loved fighting, which made him kind of troublesome at times, but was a good thing for both of us the way it turned out.

I had been in the tough racket of managin' knights of the squared circle just about long enough to know what the customers crave, which is action, when I first set eyes on Trapp.

It's up in northern Michigan and the little runt, all hairy chest, muscle and long arms is swingin' an ax like the one thing in the world he hates is slow motion. He hacks through a twenty-eight inch pine timber without stoppin' once to spit on his hands, and when he's done it appears he has won the boiled ham which is the first prize in the an-

nual Portage Lake log-choppin' tournament.

I get a good glimpse of Trapp as he straightens up to accept the plaudits of the assembled multitude, and my first impulse is to look around and see what tree he had climbed out of. Honest, all the ape needs is a tail and a couple of coconuts to play with.

He owns one of them inverted chins. His nose is broad and sad, lookin' like his ma had parked a flatiron on it when he was a baby. And his brow is low enough to be in keepin' with the rest of the picture.

But it's his eyes, beady gray buttons, set deep in their sockets and blazin' with a strange animal-like intensity, that tips me off to Trapp bein' born and made for the ring. There's fight in them. Any one could see right away

that what that baby wanted, and what he got, was the same thing.

Barrin' the monkeys, his ancestry is straight Hibernian. Still, there's nothin' actually unpleasant about his pan as he stands there huggin' the ham and grinnin' like a kid that has just shook hands with Santa Claus.

"Pardon me," I says, steppin' over toward him, "but can you swing them arms just as good without no ax? You see, homicide ain't included in my business."

The grin vanishes. "What business is that?" he asks as solemn as if he was talkin' to an undertaker.

"Step into my office," I says, leadin' him away.

Well, I didn't have no office in that jay burg, so we went across the street to a place called Winter's Saloon; and needless to state, I signed up Ram.

THE tree butcher weighed lighter than he looked, but he was rough hewn.

"Mr. Webster," he'd say to me, when I was tryin' to explain the number of paid admissions big fights draw among the more civilized and populous communities, "you ought to see the crowd I can get together when I get mad. Only, the police always stop me when I get goin' good."

"Never mind the cops," I'd tell him, "but look out that some real fighter doesn't stop you with one on the button some day."

I'd almost always tell him that to keep him from swellin' up with overconfidence, the same bein' what has hung a sudden knockout on many a promisin' young lad.

Then Ram objected to wearin' gloves, claimin' that it would cramp his style unless they was loaded with pig iron or somethin' good and heavy.

Honest, he was still as green as the pines of his native habitat when I got him his first tryout at a sportin' club in Stamford, Connecticut, that was short a lightweight on its 4th of July card. Ram was to get twenty-five bucks and carfare. I wasn't interested in the money, but I wanted to see how the baboon would stack up in the ring.

The bird Ram was slated to mingle fisticuffs with was a fighter named Tom Mularkey who had grown gray-headed in the game, and had grandchildren. He was good in his day, the boys said, but nobody could remember that far back.

Tom had an accurate idea of the fight market, and he knew exactly how much fighter twenty-five bucks could buy in these days of prosperity and mortgaged motor cars. He gave the customers their money's worth, but not a nickel more, and he preferred to take a long time earnin' his salary.

Mularkey steps into the ring first, confidently expectin' this Rameses Trapp, whom he had never heard of and neither had anybody else, would be simply another twenty-five-dollar mug that would act accordingly. After hangin' on the ropes and makin' a few fancy flourishes in the rosin with his feet, Tom sits down in his corner.

"That's the guy," I says, pointin' him out to Ram. "Don't forget all I told you and don't drop that left guard or you'll wake up kissin' the mat."

"With them green pants on?" says Ram, kind of bewildered by the flood lights and the tobacco smoke and all. "You mean I don't have to wait till he makes a nasty remark or nothin'? Just step up and paste him on the jaw for no reason at all?"

"Shake hands with him first," I warns Ram. "Then step back quick and try for his smeller."

"It sounds like a dirty trick," says

the little ape, gloomily. "Shakin' hands with a guy and then smackin' him."

"He'll bounce one off your chin quick enough if you don't," says I, boostin' Ram through the ropes.

"Will he?" calls back Michigan's champion lightweight logchopper. "Them green pants give me a pain anyhow. I guess I'll sock him for that."

MULARKEY steps up to meet Ram, sticks a languid mitt out, shakes, lifts his paws into position and dances back to begin his customary first-round waltz. But Mularkey ain't quick enough. Somethin' like a steel piston rod snaps out, with enough steam behind it to run a locomotive and it catches Tom right on the button.

The crowd wakes up. Ram gets his first cheer as Mularkey goes down. It's new music to the ape. Heretofore when he had got into a fracas most of the eyewitnesses was against him and hollerin' for the cops. Now he sees the mob is with him and the killer instinct flares up in those little round eyes of his.

One look at the fire blazin' in them and I'm happy. I know right there that I've snagged me a real fighter out of them Michigan lumber camps.

Mularkey staggers to his feet on a Chicago count, the referee knowin' the club would never give him another job unless the local fans get some kind of play for their money.

Tom is groggy, but some of the old fight that must have been in him when he was younger bubbles to the surface and while my monkey is still drinkin' in the congratulations of the customers Mularkey tickles him in the bread-basket with six, short, fast ones.

Ram looks surprised, and mad.

Powie!

That spring steel right snaps out again, and Tom takes his second trip to the mat in twenty seconds.

The referee hems, coughs a couple of times to clear his throat, bends over slow, coughs some more and finally starts to count.

It's no use. Mularkey is listenin' to the birdies sing, and he won't wake up. The mob is howlin'.

Ram is grinnin' and proud of what he just done, but the mean look is still in his eyes and he's castin' them all around the ring. Then, suddenly—*wham!*

It's the referee that catches the unexpected wallop square on the kisser. Blood trickles all over his new silk shirt. Right away the arena goes wild. Everybody starts sluggin' tryin' to get to Ram, and he takes them on wholesale, in bunches like ripe bananas.

I'm trampled by the mob myself and it's no use tryin' to shout to Ram. He couldn't hear me for the noise and he's too busy to pay any attention anyhow.

It takes three Stamford cops that had come in on passes, a half dozen handlers, and some more volunteers to get Ram out of the ring and into the dressin' room. When he comes to, he starts rubbin' the knobs on his head where the cops had blackjacked him.

"Hell," he says, lookin' at me like I done it, "I thought you said I could fight in the prize ring without no cops spoilin' it. I'm goin' back to Michigan."

"What did you want to slug the referee for, anyhow?" I snapped at him.

"Why shouldn't I of slugged him?" Ram looks at me hard out of the corners of them wild eyes of his and I edge around behind a chair. "You're a punk manager, you are. Didn't you notice how long the referee took to start countin'?"

My mouth sort of drops open and stays that way. I realize right then that Rameses Trapp, Esquire, has got more between the ears than a mop of dun-colored hair. Here, all along, I'd been thinkin' he was dumb because he looked it. Faces fool a guy that way sometimes.

WELL, after I had settled with the Stamford club for the damage Ram done to their referee and other property, I begin tourin' the battlin' ape through the sticks. Ram mops up the local talent and it's a joy to have a fighter so whole-heartedly interested in his business.

Ram learns a little control and quits slammin' ushers on the chin as he steps into the ring. And he only loses one bout—that is when he climbs over the ropes and goes after a patron of the manly art who he thought was hootin' at him.

The more experience Ram gets, the faster he gets, and it ain't long before he's what I'd call an ace aggressive fighter. The kid is a natural born glove-thrower. In the ring he's an eye-ful of action, hitting from all angles, goin' in, slidin' away, jumpin' into the air, close in and at long range.

Havin' plucked the daisies, we begin lookin' for guys with a rep. But the boys that think they're good aren't so willing to take on Ram for the entertainment of the sportin' gentry and an equitable share of the proceeds.

We get a good bout in Frisco and two in New Orleans with plenty of publicity. Ram wins all three on knockouts. After that, word seems to spread around among the ex-taxi-drivers and college-bred pugilists that there ain't no percentage in a hopeful lightweight exchangin' wallops with Ram, the Wild Man from Michigan.

It's surprisin' the way dates are already filled on all the cards. You'd think prize fighters was society débutantes and none of them wanted to dance with a rough bird like Trapp. The goin' is pretty tough for awhile, and my ape just about decides to have a relapse and go in for sockin' cops again.

"Aw, why not, Mr. Webster?" he says to me one day as we're sittin' cursin' in a St. Louis hotel. "You can always get action out of cops if there's enough of them."

"Nothin' doin'," I says. "Hold on awhile, kid. Once you get the public wise to your style of fightin', these babies 'll have to fight you."

"Well, get me an ax then," says Ram seriously, "and find me some thick timbers. I got to swing at somethin'."

That afternoon they put us out of the damaged hotel, and while I'm busy down at the station house convincin' the desk lieutenant that Ram ain't any nuttier than he is, but is just a healthy young lumberjack pinin' away for want of exercise, a guy comes in with a telegram.

It's from Tony Santone's manager, sayin' Tony will take on my ape for ten rounds in one of the outlyin' boroughs of New York City.

There's somethin' strange about this Tony mug. He's a clever boxer, a good fighter, and he ain't yellow. In fistic circles he represents the chief obstacle between the lightweight title aspirants and the title. The boys has to lick Tony to get a crack at the crown. And so far they can't lick him.

Tony's a lot better'n the champ. Everybody knows that. But nobody does anythin' about it. It's just one of those things; and some shrewd guessers figured it out that Tony was on the

champ's pay roll, to keep off bothersome contestants. For appearance's sake Tony has mixed a couple of times with the actual title-holder, but he never half fought and both times lost on a feeble decision.

It's a cinch Tony don't want to be champ. Somehow or other he's makin' plenty where he is, and he's been a pretty effective blockade right along.

I'M not sure my wild man is tamed sufficient, or cool-headed enough, to tackle a cold, scientific fighter like Santone yet; but it's a great chance, and Ram, of course, is all for takin' it.

There's another thing about this Tony Santone that don't strike my nostrils like the odor of rosebuds. He's got a lot of outside interests that he always claims is takin' up a lot of his time. He don't ever say what they are, either, bein' one of these sly, mysterious guys; but it is generally conceded he owns a string of speakeasies, or makes books on the gee-gees, or some such racket.

Well, Ram and I get to New York; and the breaks are against us like the ocean waves on a sea wall.

First Ram goes nuts on a female, and to make it worse the dame encourages him.

She ain't one of these dizzy bonbons that could be eliminated offhand either. She's from New England and she's got bright blue eyes, smart tailor-made clothes and a determined chin that she must have inherited from some Puritan ancestor when he fell off the Mayflower onto the Plymouth Rock.

Her name is Faith Finlay and what she ever seen in my small brute from the tall timbers of Michigan I couldn't see. She works in a broker's office and her mind is as hard to change as a fifty-dollar-bill in Woolworth's.

Well, I notice Ram sprucin' up sardonially and slowin' up in his fightin'. His punch begins to lack the snap it used to have. He don't seem to have the strength of his convictions any more about boxin' bein' the highest form of endeavor in which the human male can indulge.

He comes over to the hotel one day with a black eye that was presented to him by one of his sparrin' partners, and lookin' sadder'n a yaller dog without fleas.

"Say, Mr. Webster," he says, "you'd better call off this fight with Mr. Santone."

"Huh?" I couldn't get another syllable out. I'm tongue-tied.

"Yeh," goes on Ram, holdin' his head down low, "I'd like to battle him, but my girl says fightin's too rough a racket for the man that she's goin' to marry. She says I gotta go into business."

"Do you want to go into business?" I ask him.

"Listen, Mr. Webster," he says, and I don't know whether he's goin' to get mad, or cry, or what, he's so choked up with emotion. "You know as well as I do that fightin' is the only business I care a rap about. Gee, it's been great with you, and all."

"Well," I said, softenin', "think it over, kid. There's a lot of nice girls that gets married and their husbands has to fight all their lives—with them."

Ram just stared at me and walked out. I didn't see him for three days and I didn't bother lookin' for him. I know he's got a tough decision to make, and nobody could make it for him.

He loved the girl and he loved fightin'. One was Nature assertin' herself. The other was plain instinct where Ram was concerned, there bein' no

mental processes involved in his taste for slammin' other guys on the nose.

FINALLY Ram wanders into my room again and sits down like he ain't slept since I seen him last.

"Well," I says, hopefully, "did you break with her? I know a guy who knows lots of girls and—"

Ram looks out of the window. He ain't listenin'.

"Faith is the only girl I ever fell for, Mr. Webster," he says. "And I might as well tell you, the fight is off. Yeh," he goes on, standin' up, "I'm already in business; a nice clean business. We both are, Mr. Webster—for Faith's sake."

"For whose sake?" I shout. "*We!* What business?"

"The laundry business, Mr. Webster," says Ram, tryin' to smile.

Then while I'm holdin' my head and screamin' at him to stop, Ram explains in simple and direct language how he has met a man that owned a high-class shirt shreddery out in Astoria and how he was sellin' out at a sacrifice price.

"What about the fight?" I holler, when he finally gives me a chance to get a word in. "You signed a contract. And where do I come in on this laundry gag?"

"Oh—you?" says Ram calmly. "I didn't have enough money to buy the business alone so I told the guy you would go in on it with me."

I get a sudden flash of brains, figurin' how maybe I can save Ram from this schemin' female from New England.

"Ram," I says seriously, "if you'll go through with this Santone fight, I'll go into the laundry business with you."

Ram thinks a moment, and nods. "It 'll be my last fight, though," he says. There's a soft wistfulness in his

voice that I never would have believed he had in him.

Back of my head is the idea that if Ram 'll fight once more, he'll snap right back to the ring as natural as a Dutchman grabbin' for liverwurst; and though I am too much of a gentleman to ever strike a lady that's smaller than I am, if I could have got my hands near this Faith Finlay, she would be one jane that would get a good crack on the nose from me.

About two weeks later I get restless because Ram ain't keepin' up with his light trainin' like he ought to, and I grab a cab and cross the Queensborough Bridge to Astoria, headin' for the wash works of which I am part owner.

RAM is all dressed up in a snappy suit Faith had picked out for him that ain't got a tight waistline nor no green stripes in it, and he's fingerin' a lot of buttons on his desk.

"Gee, I'm glad you came," he says, as he looks up and sees me. "This is Mrs. Hause's laundry." He holds up a handful of assorted buttons.

"Say, do we wash buttons, too?" I ask him puzzled.

"No," he replies slowly. "This is all that's left. The cleanin' chemicals was too strong or somethin' this week. Here's Mrs. Feinberg's, and Mrs. Berg's and Mrs. Berndt's laundry, too." He points to several little piles of buttons at his elbow. "I guess maybe they'll be sore about it, don't you?"

I get ready to explode when Ram reaches over the side of his desk and drags out some nicely shredded pyjamas, shirts, towels, tablecloths, lingerie and the usual *et ceteras* of a big Monday wash.

"These ain't so bad, though," he says, eyin' the remnants thoughtfully. "They'd of been perfect if it hadn't

of been for them mangles not bein' adjusted right."

While I'm starin' goofy-eyed at the rags and tryin' to figure out how much it's goin' to cost for replacin' the garments of Astoria's housewives, a smart-lookin' egg busts into the office without knockin' or any other formality.

One look at him and I can tell he don't work for a livin', in spite of his freshly pressed pants and the diamonds that is sproutin' from his shirt front like small cabbages.

"I hear you boys have bought the laundry," he says, and I don't like the tone of his voice.

"You got big ears for your age, little boy," I says. "What if we did?"

"Nothin'," he says, sittin' on a corner of Ram's desk. "I suppose I get my cut from you lads this week. That's all."

"What cut?" I says. "And get off Mr. Trapp's desk."

The guy don't budge. "Protection!" He bites the word off close to the handle. "You don't want your laundry stole, and your drivers beat up, do you?"

"That's what cops are for," I says. "And what I pay taxes for. Run along now, sonny, and crack some more safes for a livin'."

"Yeh?" There's a mean snarl to his tone now, and he curls his thin lips. "Out here you pay *me*, see?"

I'm so busy out-starin' this stranger that I don't notice that Ram has got out of his chair and the first thing I know, *swish!* His right arm shoots past my face and his fist catches this tinhorn racketeer right on the mouth.

The guy goes down spittin' blood and teeth, and his language is somethin' fierce for a laundry.

Ram bends over, picks him up like a terrier shakin' a rat, drags him to the

door and throws him out. He comes back, smackin' his hands together and smilin'.

"Well, Mr. Webster," he says, "I guess we got rid of that bum."

I'm about to agree with him when the strawberry blonde we inherited for a cashier comes runnin' in like the wash factory was burnin' up.

"Oh, Mr. Trapp!" she yodels. "What have you done? That's Benny. He collects for the Knuckle Duster gang. The other man that owned the place always paid. Gee, he'll rod you sure. Omigawd, I ain't workin' here any longer. He'll blow up the place or somethin'. I quit."

"Miss Murphy," I says with dignity. "You don't have to. You're fired."

STILL, after she's put her hat on and beat it, I begin to feel worried about Trapp myself. I've heard of these here laundry racketeers. It ain't the laundry I care about, it's Ram's fight, and I don't want nothin' to happen to him before his bout with Santone.

"Maybe you'd better stay in New York awhile and we'll hire a guy to run this laundry business for us," I suggest.

The mean look comes into Trapp's eyes, like it does when he is in the prize ring.

"I'm stickin' here," he growls. "You can go back if you want." There's no use tryin' to change his mind, so I change mine instead and decide to stay with him.

Well, I'll say this much for Benny's bunch. They're fast workers. The next afternoon Trapp and me are still figurin' out how much we owe the customers, deductin', of course, for the buttons we plan on returnin' them, when the phone rings.

It's a call from police headquarters in New York.

"Say," says a gruff voice, "there's a horse and wagon from your laundry grazin' in Central Park, and if you don't come over and claim him quick you'll be fined for destroyin' city property."

"Ain't there no laundryman with him?" I ask.

"Don't try to be funny," says the voice. "What would a laundryman be doin' grazin' in Central Park?" And he hangs up.

Before I can explain to Ram what's happened, the phone rings again, only this time it's one of our trucks that has been found down near the Street Cleanin' Department docks on the East River.

"What do these cops think our laundry is, an Easter egg hunt?" snaps Ram as I tell him the sad tidings.

Brring! It's the phone again.

"Where's our wagon this time?" I bark, pickin' up the receiver.

"Yonkers!" comes back the reply.

So it goes all afternoon, and by five o'clock the hospitals begin callin' up with word that our drivers has come to and may be expected to live. In the mornin' the drivers supplement the statement by remarkin' that henceforth they'll live in Jersey, which is too far away from Astoria to work in a laundry there.

"I guess," offers Ram, "that Benny guy thinks he's hardboiled, huh, Mr. Webster? I'll fix him."

"What are you goin' to do?" I asks, sudden shivers runnin' up and down my back.

"Drive a wagon myself, of course," says Ram.

Coaxin' don't do me any more good than cursin'. Ram's set on drivin' one of his own laundry wagons, and he

leaves me in the wash factory while he clatters down the driveway and up the paved street, urgin' his nag to a fast trot.

About three o'clock that afternoon I've had no word from Ram, and fearin' the worst, I begin callin' up the hospitals askin' if anythin' lookin' like an ape, and fightin', had been brought in yet.

That don't get no response, so I try the police station; but he ain't there either.

IT gets dark and the help goes home, and I begin to feel kind of creepy all alone with the wash tubs and the mangles and other people's clothes and things.

I'd like to go home, but I'm held there, in spite of myself, wet with perspiration and wonderin' what has happened to Ram.

Finally I hear a racket outside and Ram's voice as he pulls up in front of the office.

"What a fight!" he yells. "Hey, Mr. Webster, you ought to have seen it."

I rushed out and what I seen of Ram was plenty. I could imagine the rest. Knife rips in his coat. Blood all over him. Both eyes black and swellin'. Nose smeared all over his face.

"Where were you?" I said. "Bat-tlin' with a steam roller?"

Ram climbs out of the wagon himself, but he's pretty stiff and muscle sore so I get the first cab that comes by and rush him over to a gym in New York for a rubdown. He tells me about it on the way over.

"Six or eight of them, I guess," he says. "Boy, what a scrap! Real fightin', just like when the boys get drunk in Michigan. Knives, sticks, clubs, fists. And baby; what I done to the

skunk that's the leader of the bunch! He's a little guy with a big brown wen on his nose. I sure handed him plenty."

"Listen," I says, "you're all excited now. Tell me, how are you goin' to whip this Santone guy if you get all mixed up in laundry brawls?"

"Boy, it was great!" says Ram and he heaves a sigh.

What's the sense of talkin' to a guy like that?

Well, outside of the racketeers tryin' to burn down the wash works one Sunday when there's nobody there but the watchman nothin' else much happens, and Ram acts kind of disappointed.

As it gets closer to the date set for his fight with Santone, he seems to take more interest in the bout and less in the laundry.

It's a good sign and I begin to see where Faith is maybe goin' to lose out after all, like I hoped.

The day of the fight, which is the feature on a lively card at Coney Island, Ram is in good shape. Things look as if they're ironin' out all smooth for us. I'm in New York and he is off havin' lunch with Faith.

When he don't come back I get nervous and jumpy. I call up Faith when I can stand it no longer. She's back in her office and says she left Ram an hour and a half ago.

AT 6 P.M. and no word from Ram, I'm pacin' up and down in my room and thinkin' the worst had happened. It had. The phone tinkles and I'm able to catch a few hasty words from Ram before a scuffle cuts off his voice and I can tell he's been yanked away from the mouthpiece.

"Hello, Mr. Webster," he says, "I'm in Flushing—at a phone booth in

a cigar store. Some of Benny's gang—got me when I left Faith—stuck guns in my stummick and made me get into a swell car—insisted on takin' me for a ride. When I told them I had to meet a guy in New York—they just laughed—I meant you, Mr. Webster. I ran in here to phone while some of them went into a speakeasy next door for a drink—thought I'd better phone you so's you wouldn't worry—hope they don't take me for too long a ride and make me late for the fight—"

That was all I got before he was dragged away from the phone. Well, I snapped into it and got police headquarters on the wire right away.

"Hey," I said, "they're killin' a guy out in Flushing. Hurry up! Near a cigar store that's situated near a speak-easy."

"That's all right, son," answers a genial voice. "I take a drink myself once in awhile."

The second time I call up, the cop that answers the phone says he'll have me pinched if I don't stop interferin' with police business. Finally I get hold of a fellow who takes me seriously, but I can tell he's pretty skeptical. Anyhow he sends around a couple of plainclothes men in a fast car. I pile in and the three of us dash out to Flushing.

When I tell them about the laundry business and how Ram had licked Benny's gang, they both look at each other, then at me.

"Say," says the biggest one of the two, "I suppose you think you're smart, ropin' in the cops to help you out in your gang fights, don't you? I got a mind to take you back to headquarters and look you over."

But he don't. I talk the two of them into goin' on and we drive all over Flushing and the outskirts as far as the

garbage dumps across Flushing Creek and down to Whitestone Landing. Apparently nobody has seen the car with Ram and the guys from Benny's gang in it. But finally we come to an old man who lives down where the railroad tracks start cuttin' across the meadows.

He claims he seen a car with a lot of young guys in it and heard shots bein' fired and he kind of thought, though he wasn't certain, that when it pulled back toward town there wasn't as many in it as there had been when it arrived.

We raced over to where he said the fight was, and the signs of it was evident in the road, but we couldn't find no corpse of Ram, so we went into the Flushing police station to organize a regular search. While we're there and the dicks is talkin' to the desk lieutenant, I grab a chance to phone the fight arena in Coney Island that the Santone bout is off on account of one of the contestants which is Ram bein' murdered in the Flushing meadows.

"Murdered!" says Ike McGann, who's puttin' on the show, "you're crazy, Dan Webster, he's down here now. Mad as the devil about somethin' and wonderin' where you are."

"What?" I says, and I could of kissed McGann over the phone. That's the best news I ever heard from a fight promoter.

"Yeh," goes on McGann. "He looks as if he'd been drinkin', but otherwise he seems in fair shape outside of a cut over his left eye. He's been askin' me if I couldn't put on his bout earlier."

"I'll be right over," I says, hangin' up the receiver and dashin' out of the station house without waitin' to thank the plain-clothes men who had come out to Flushing with me. Well, I found a taxi-driver and slipped him thirty bucks to race me to Coney Island, and

he did, though I guess I aged ten years in the process.

A T that, I get to the arena just in time to shake Ram by the hand as he's climbin' into the ring.

"I'm glad you got here, Mr. Webster," he says, gripping my hand hard. "This is my last fight—maybe." He tried to smile, but I could see he was pretty white under the gills as if somethin' was painin' him somewhere.

"I'll tell you about the other scrap later," he calls back and steps into the center to meet Santone, who's glarin' at him with a nasty smirk on his lips.

Lookin' at Ram as he stands up there under the flood lights, he don't seem to be built right and finally I notice that what causes the illusion is a big bulge in the right hip of his tights, and I wonder if he's takin' to packin' a gat into the prize ring on account of them gangsters or what. But I don't have a chance to ask him, and nobody else seems to notice it.

Ram and Tony Santone shake, break and they're off.

I never seen Ram fight better. He was unchained lightnin' and what he didn't hurl at Tony was just too bad. Right after Ram's first terrific onslaught Tony goes into a clinch. He looks tired already. His right eye is closed, his left swollen, his nose split, his lips bloody.

Ram breaks from the clinch as Tony backs toward the ropes. Tony seems to be snarlin' or cursin'. Ram's eyes are burnin' like a wild bull's. As Tony backs, Ram drives his left to Tony's body and his right to his chin. Tony's hands drop to his sides and he slowly collapses to a sitting position.

But he ain't yellow. He tries to rise and falls over backward, half in, half out of the ring.

The place goes wild and Ram for once in his life ain't payin' any attention to the crowd. He just smiles grimly as Tony totters towards him again and is saved by the bell.

Ram wouldn't talk during the breathin' spell. He sat in his corner starin' hard at Santone and watchin' 'Tony's people try to put a little life in him again.

As the gong rings for the second stanza, that killer look creeps into Ram's beady eyes again and he steps in with a rush, smashing the battered body of Santone with a vicious right to the jaw, then a left. Santone goes down again.

By this time the crowd has begun to yell to McGann to stop the massacre. Ram is a fiend. They've never seen nobody throw gloves like him before. McGann began yelling himself.

But Ram was too engrossed in the fierce business before him to pay any attention. He waited till Santone had climbed back on his feet and then rushed into the kill like the leader of a wolf pack.

"Don't hit him again!" "He's out on his feet!" "Let him alone. He's had plenty!" yells the mob, but Ram never hesitated. He beat down Santone's weak defense and planted a right smash and two lefts to the chin. Santone drops for the third time, and McGann rushes in and stops the fight.

"Hey," I screams, climbin' into the ring and runnin' over to Ram, afraid he'd spoil everythin' by takin' a crack at McGann for stoppin' the slaughter, "what's the idea of murderin' him? You got him licked, kid."

"Why shouldn't I murder the dirty rat?" says Ram slowly. "Look at that brown wen on his nose. He's the head of them laundry racketeers that stole our wagons and took me to Flushing."

I didn't have a comeback. Just stood there watchin' them help Tony Santone out of the ring.

ALL of a sudden I hear Ram give a kind of a muffled groan and I turn in time to see him crumple like his legs were paper and crash to the floor. He's fainted and his face is white as a sheet. I grab a pail and am splashin' some water on him when the doc climbs into the ring and bends over him.

Ram opens his eyes slowly, groans and points to his right hip. I notice that bulge on the side of his tights, only this time it's damp, and dark blood is stainin' his fightin' trunks. We rush him into the dressin' room and rip his tights off.

The kid is almost bleedin' to death from two bullet wounds in his right thigh.

He had tried to plug them with rubbin' towels for bandages, but the fight had opened them up again.

Say, I just look at him and rub my eyes, and feel like blowin' my nose, though I know I ain't got no cold. Don't let anybody kid you, brother, Ram was the gamest fighter and the greatest battler I ever handled. Him, fightin' the best fight of his life with gangsters' lead in him, and his life blood ebbin' out of the nasty flesh rips in his leg.

In the mornin' Ram is in a hospital and I'm sittin' beside him readin' the newspaper stories of the fight. He wants to tell me about the swell battle he had with Benny and some more of Santone's thugs when they took him out to Flushing meadows.

The nurse keeps tellin' him to lie back and she won't let him talk about it, for fear the excitement will be bad for him.

"Well anyhow, Mr. Webster," says Ram, "I guess I'll stick to the fight racket. It ain't as tough as the laundry industry, which is too dirty a business for guys like you and me, ain't it? I had Faith on the phone last night and told her."

Then he turned towards the nurse. "I can talk about my girl, can't I? That ain't excitin', because I ain't got her any more." He tries to laugh at his own joke, then he faces me again.

"Anyhow a nice girl like her wouldn't want to tie to a mug like me, no matter what business I was in, don't you think so, Mr. Webster?"

I CAN see he's still stuck on Faith Finlay, and I'm gettin' ready to tell him he's the salt of the earth, and any girl that was any good ought to be proud of him, when the phone rings. The call is for me.

"Hello, Mr. Webster." It's Faith talkin'. "Listen, I want to tell you

somethin'. Last night Rameses called me up and told me to go to hell, that he was goin' to stick in the fight game, and I want you to know that no man can tell me that and get away with it."

"Well, what do I—"

But you know how some janes are, once they get on the phone. I don't get a chance to say another word, and Faith goes on:

"I want you to tell him that too, and tell him that just as soon as he's well enough I'm goin' to take him right down to the City Hall and marry him, and you can come and be a witness, Mr. Webster, and I'll be right up to see Ram this mornin' and—"

I hung up on her. As I said, you know how some women are once they get hold of a telephone, and, besides, Ram wanted to know what she was sayin' and I figured she'd already said plenty. She could tell him the rest when she got to the hospital, and I had beat it.

THE END.



Kangaroo Freaks

THERE are a good many different kinds of kangaroos. Some climb trees and have slender tails, while others, like the big gray kangaroo, can touch forty miles an hour or more across the plain. Shooting kangaroos is no great sport, because an automobile can approach very close to them; the real sport is to chase a kangaroo on horseback. That stunt will test the fiber of any man and horse in the world.

Curiously, the young kangaroo, when it is born after a short period of gestation, is about an inch long and looks like a young mouse taken from its nest. The mother "roo" picks up her baby with her lips and attaches it to her nipples inside her pouch, where the delicate little creature clings like glue. Special muscles in the mammary glands pump food fluids into the young until it is large enough to let loose. Thereafter it rides the pouch, sometimes poking out its head to look at the world like a jack in the box—and a very silky, flossy little head it has. If the mother is pursued too hard she will drop her young "Joey" in the bush and come back for it afterward.

Wyman Sidney Smith.



"That's the end of him!"

Almost a Gentleman

A knight of the underworld is young Joe Leander, duty bound to his gangster allies, yet fighting to rescue the girl whom he worships from afar

By ROBERT TERRY SHANNON

Author of "The Resurrection of Red O'Laughlan," "Once in a Lifetime," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

JOE LEANDER, hard-boiled, but fundamentally decent member of Little Tony Zelig's New York mob, goes to the hotel of Harrison Howe to shake him down for protection on some of his property. Howe, a genial host of the Great White Way, takes a liking to the straight-spoken young gangster, and introduces him to his Boston niece, Eleanor Giddings.

Eleanor, anxious to see real underworld life, persuades Joe against his will to take her to a real dive. He

takes her to Horse McGuire's; and McGuire, wishing to start things with the rival Zelig, gets offensive. Joe gets the drop on him and escapes with Eleanor.

Joe learns that her fiancé is Lee Martin, the brilliant young lawyer who had saved Joe from an unjust murder charge earlier in his career; and Martin confides that Horse McGuire is blackmailing him with some I. O. U.'s won in a crooked game. Joe chivalrously determines to wipe McGuire

This story began in the *Argosy* for October 12.

from the path of the two human beings whom he most admires, and leaves before they can stop him.

He fixes up something of an alibi at Harrison Howe's hotel, the Shenandoah, where he meets a likable chorus girl, Helen Reed. Slipping out of the hotel, he hurries to Tony Zelig's. Tony tries to get Joe to let the gang take care of McGuire, since it's really their fight, and because he wants Joe to become his respectable go-between in big business deals. As Tony starts out to round up the gang, Eleanor phones and tells Joe she is coming down there to stop him from committing murder.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE FIRST PUNCH.

WHEN Zelig had left, Joe fell to pacing the darkened apartment, driven to motion by the inner pressure of suppressed nervous energy. A tiger, enclosed by steel bars, would have been no more restless. Presently he controlled himself and stood at a darkened window looking down upon the half-deserted street.

The traffic and congestion had dwindled to an occasional hurrying taxi; a belated pedestrian here and there hastened homeward. Joe lifted the window and the crisp night air flowed around his face and rattled a newspaper behind him. Dim lights burned in the closed neighborhood stores, but against the sky of the North was the golden glow of the uptown city, a soft tide of light that threw its illumination from a million globes all night long against the clouds.

All of his life, Joe had been seeing that glow against the sky, that up-pouring of the city's soul, but never before had he sensed it as to-night. Up there

was a radiance tingling with promise, a withheld elixir of life that eluded his parched throat.

Surrounding him here, closing him in, were drab brick walls, outside fire escapes, murky barriers. A starved, prowling night cat knocked off the loose cover of a garbage can with a clanging rattle that rasped through the night like a jagged wound.

Joe shut the window and returned to the depths of Tony Zelig's soft, capacious chair. Smoke from a cigarette, drawn hungrily to the depths of his lungs, failed to give any nourishing satisfaction and he ground out the stub into an already filled ashtray.

At this hour the taxicabs could make rapid speed and he realized that Eleanor would be here any minute. Sure enough, the buzzer from the entrance sounded and he pressed the button that released the entrance catch downstairs. Stepping out into the hall he called down: "All right—three flights up."

He sensed, rather than heard, her progress up the gloomy stairs. When she got to the top, radiating the faintest of perfume, he stood aside from the door of the darkened apartment.

"The lights went on the blink in here—but it's all right," he told her. "Probably a fuse blew out."

She passed through the door without hesitating, her young elastic body moving with a natural, lithe grace. Joe closed the door behind her; enough light filtered in through the windows to make the furniture vaguely discernible. In the obscurity he could see only her slim outline, but when she dropped into a chair, she was all but invisible. Nevertheless, the whole room was changed; it seemed charged with emanations of her pervading vitality.

Joe remained standing, looking at her in the semi-darkness in a constrict-

tion of his heart that gave a crowded sensation inside his chest.

"You might as well get it through your head that you're wasting your time here," he said.

Eleanor did not answer. He could feel that she had not withdrawn her eyes from his face and he was conscious, at the same time, of a confusion and a tumultuous humiliation in his own conscience. He hesitated a moment, and spoke to her with a severity that was almost anger.

"LISTEN, you're not helping me any, and you're going to get into a lot of trouble yourself if you don't stay away. No matter what you say to me, it won't make any difference. I'm not running this affair between Tony Zelig and Horse McGuire. The best thing you can do is to get next to yourself and hop out of here."

But the harshness of his words, even as he spoke, seemed too cruel and he softened them. "You're a wonderful girl, but you just don't understand. I want to keep you out of a lot of trouble and maybe disgrace. You're too nice for this kind of stuff—won't you please go home?"

She thought a moment, then answered softly, "No."

"I tell you, you can't stay here; this is Tony Zelig's place. Are you crazy?"

"I'm not going to have the blood of a murderer on my hands," she said distinctly. "If I don't stop you, that's exactly what will happen. I inspired the trouble between you and McGuire to-night; without intending to, but I'm responsible just the same. On top of that you've got some chivalrous illusion that you'd be helping Lee Martin and me if McGuire was put out of the way. I might as well admit that I made you take me out to-night because

I was in a frivolous, vain mood. I acted like a flapper."

"You're wasting your time, I tell you!" Joe repeated bitterly.

"No. I acted the vain, spoiled poor-little-rich-girl and it was like lighting a fuse to a stick of dynamite," she went on remorsefully. "I'm not at all proud of myself, but don't think I'm conventional enough to take the easiest way out, which would be simply to vanish from the picture. I simply can't let you get mixed up in a crime on my account."

Her words hit him hard and clean; for a moment he was baffled to find an answer.

"If you want to protect somebody, why don't you get to work on Lee Martin?" he asked her slowly. "You love him and you're going to marry him. You got some right to interfere there. He's a big man, but he's got to get hold of himself and quit monkeying around with these mobs. A man like Martin ain't got any business gambling in McGuire's place and associating with guns. You better concentrate on him before it is too late."

"But he's not in any immediate danger, and you are!" she returned swiftly. "Won't you come away from here with me? Please?"

"That's silly. Where would we go?"

"Any place you say, just so you keep away from this trouble!" she insisted urgently. "We'll go up to my Uncle Harrison Howe's and tell him the whole story. He'll help us out and get you away."

Joe laughed shortly, nervous. "That's funny! You know, I rented a room at his hotel to-night just for an alibi in case I needed one."

"Then please, please come up there!" she implored him. "All you have to do is walk out of this place

and leave the whole terrible thing behind you. Won't you do it for me? You claim you're fond of me—I know you do care something about me. We're more than friends. Somehow, we're comrades! Can't you see that if this awful business goes on it will break,—break my heart."

SHE stopped suddenly as though her throat had tightened against further utterance and tremulous words. Her reserve, her poise, was rapidly going to pieces. Joe stood above her. Her eyes were becoming accustomed to the gloom, and she looked at him and saw his face with its high cheek bones and the straight, compressed lips; there was no exterior hint of this terrific effort he made to keep himself steady. She did not see that his hands were clenched until the nails cut into the palms.

"I've got to do what I think best," he said, without moving a muscle of his face.

Eleanor locked her fingers mechanically; otherwise she was without motion; rigid and tense.

"I know I'm making a fool out of myself over you," she said. "You have a heart of stone."

Her voice was like a muffled cry. Joe's effort at self-restraint was like holding a gigantic beast in leash. More than all else he wanted to sweep her into his arms and feel the wild, delirious joy of her sweet lips against his own.

Something—a great weight of common sense restrained him. There was no use piling up future unhappiness. It was best to bear this severe pain now and have it over with. No use to torture himself with empty husks.

"We don't mean a thing on earth to each other," he said, tonelessly. "It

was a mistake we ever met. In the name of heaven, please go!"

Before she could answer, the taut silence of the room was shattered by the sudden, vicious fury of belching revolvers in the street below.

It was as though an automobile had started backfiring violently, yet the sound was unmistakably different. Some one below let out a hoarse cry, then all was silent.

"You waited too long," Joe breathed.

He was at the window in two strides; got there in time to see several scurrying figures scattering for cover. One dashed around a corner and another disappeared into a doorway. The engine of a sedan hummed and he glimpsed the machine scooting away, rocking with speed.

Then, all at once, his whole being grew chill. Alone, crumpled and neglected, a body lay in the middle of the street.

Spent and slumped, the form seemed curiously careless of its grotesque aspect. Death has no concern with appearances.

Joe could make out a queer familiarity about the short legs; one arm was extended above the head and the other was crooked across the face as though to protect the features from a driving rain. Ten feet away, as though blown there by a blast of wind, rested Little Tony Zelig's pearl-gray felt hat. Joe's tongue felt dry and rough against his palate.

"So that's the end of poor Tony Zelig," he said aloud. "McGuire beat him to the punch."

Joe stood at the window looking out. For a moment he remained transfixed as though in a dream; the sight of Tony Zelig lying dead in the street did not, at once, seem actually true. Sud-

den death always, at first, is like an illusion. Consciousness of what had just happened developed little by little, seeping into his understanding with an increasing weight of tragedy.

Eleanor's voice, small and strained, was at his shoulder: "Now you see before your eyes what can happen. It might have been you lying down there, dead."

A POLICE whistle sounded and they could hear running feet slapping along the sidewalk. In the adjoining homes windows were being raised and heads thrust out.

To-morrow morning it would be on the front pages of the newspapers:

NEW GANG WAR CLAIMS VICTIM!

Hundreds and thousands would read it, but to most of them it would be more like fiction than fact. Eleanor could not repress a shudder at the ghastly reality before her eyes.

"What are you going to do now?" she asked Joe in a low voice.

Gradually his mind was sharpened; it was a funny thing, but he could not get rid of the recollection that he had seen a man running into the building across the way. Instinct told Joe that it had been one of the killers. The doorway in which he disappeared was located between two small stores and led to the walk-up apartment above. Also, the doorway was directly opposite the downstairs exit of this building that sheltered Tony Zelig's apartment.

"Look in that doorway across the street," Joe said to Eleanor, clutching her arm unconsciously. "Do you see anybody watching from just outside the door?"

A small crowd of innocent people were gathering around Zelig's body,

but Eleanor and Joe looked past them. Both were breathing thinly.

"I—I think I see somebody inside the door," she whispered. "Yes, there's a man standing there."

"There's a taxicab standing a half block down, next to the curb," Joe said quickly. "The driver is sitting right at the wheel; he isn't even looking around. That's not natural; he's not paying any attention at all to the excitement. That sedan that shot away from here; did you see anybody in it?"

Eleanor hesitated. "By the time I got to the window it was in motion."

"I got here in time to see two or three fellows scattering, and they didn't get into the sedan," Joe went on tensely. "That machine went away empty. It was a bluff, a stall to make the cops think these bump-off guys got away in it. They were smart enough to set up a false clue. No, they're still hanging around down there!"

Her stricken face looked at him steadily, the blue eyes opened wide with a desperate kind of excitement. "But why don't they run away, Joe? Do you think—"

His face was set like dark, chiseled stone.

"I think they're still down there watching this house. Probably they were watching it when I came in. They were waiting for me and Tony to come out together. When I didn't show up, they waited and got him when the good chance came. Yeah, I got a hunch that if I went out into the street now they'd start setting off their firecrackers. Even if a lot of people are standing around. That's why they got that taxi waiting over there; to make their get-away in."

Eleanor moved away from the window; her lips slightly parted and anger

in her eyes deepened. "But, Joe, are such things possible?"

HIS compressed lips drew back across white teeth almost in a snarl, but his scorn was directed at the McGuire mob, not at Eleanor Giddings.

"Are such things possible?" he echoed her bitterly. "Look at the crowd carrying Tony to the sidewalk, and ask me whether it's possible or not. Anything that can be done by a killer with his head full of hop and a gat in his hand is possible in this town."

He turned to her, aflame with sudden impatience: "Didn't I tell you not to come down here! You see what you got yourself into. You're right down here in the middle of hell broke loose. The cops know that Tony Zelig lives here, and so does McGuire's mob. Suppose either bunch comes busting in here—how do you think I'm going to protect you?"

She faced him bravely. "I'm not thinking about myself, Joe! They wouldn't hurt me. It's you they'd be after."

"I suppose the disgrace and notoriety wouldn't hurt you!" he retorted, unable to restrain his chagrin at her jeopardy. "They'd plaster you with so much mud you'd never get it off your name as long as you live. They'd call you a gangster's woman. Oh, I'm not sore at you, Eleanor; I'm just so damn sorry for you that it gets my goat." His voice trailed off into a queer tone and then, as though by an effort of will, came back to normal. "I got to get you out of here!"

"Yes, we must get away from here," she said. "And you will come with me."

He gave her a fleeting glance of tenderness, mixed with exasperation.

"If I listened to you," he said impatiently, "you'd weaken me down to a kitten. I got no business going with you. You don't belong to me and I don't belong to you. Do you think I'm going to take a run-out powder, with Tony Zelig dead down there in the street?"

"You're going to do what I say, nevertheless," she said, with a trace of serenity oddly at variance with the soul-struggle between them.

He fought against the way she kept pounding at his will. At any minute now the police or, worse, McGuire's men might come storming in. There would be arrest—or death. With a gesture of impatience he seized her arm and directed her toward the door while he gathered his hat and overcoat.

"Don't argue!" he commanded.

"Anything you say," she responded, with growing calmness.

He led the way into the outer hall. Various sounds reached them from other apartments, indicating the tenants had been aroused by the excitement in the street. Something told Joe that he and she dared not attempt escape normally down the front way; there was no time to lose and they moved quickly up a flight of stairs to the top floor, through the close, stale air of the building.

In the top hall at the rear was a short ladder leading to the trapdoor of the roof. Acting in concert they had no need now of words; Joe went up the ladder first, pushed aside the trap and helped Eleanor after him onto the graveled roof, thinly coated with soot-stained snow.

Up here in this dim and unfamiliar area, they sped across the united roofs and several buildings until they reached the end of the block. Here they found another trapdoor identical with the

one through which they escaped. Immediately they were down a ladder and into another building.

When they reached the street door unmolested, Eleanor paused an instant with her hand on Joe's arm. Her excitement was less than his; he was acutely aware of her poise under pressure; about her features and form was the soft contours of a cameo flushed with warmth and life. He would have hurried her at once in the street, but she stopped him and stood facing him with steady, solemn eyes:

"As long as you need me, Joe," she said, "I will stand with you. This is no lark for me. We got into this trouble together and I'll be with you to the end of it."

As she declared this uncomplicated loyalty, quiet and sincere, with an aura of beauty around her, he was disturbingly conscious of the harsh menace that awaited vaguely, yet sickeningly on the outside—and in his own nature.

"Thanks. Let's get going," he urged.

The door swung open and they stepped outside, a block distant from the scene of Zelig's death. The damp, cold air surrounded them and they were immediately swallowed up in the obscurity of the city. They went rapidly around a corner.

CHAPTER IX.

THE KING IS DEAD.

IN the late hush of the night that had settled its brief quietude upon the clamorous East Side, Joe and Eleanor avoided the appearance of haste as they sauntered further away from the place of the murder. At this hour the streets were lonely; within a few

minutes they were safely into another district of that section of the city which is so crowded with buildings and so traversed by short, narrow streets.

"I suppose if I find a taxicab and put you in it you'll be safe going home," Joe said, glancing down an empty street. "We'll keep walking until we find one."

"What you don't seem to understand," Eleanor told him with steadiness, "is that you are the one in danger. I don't mean from the police or McGuire's men either; there's an inward danger in you more terrible than anything outside. You're at the crossroads to-night and if you make a wrong turn you'll get yourself hopelessly involved in a criminal way. You simply *must* do what I tell you."

Despite his heavy spirits, Joe felt a flicker of amusement. She certainly had a quiet, but unshakable, feminine persistence.

"I can see where you'll make Lee Martin step your way after the marriage, all right," Joe grinned.

"There's nothing trivial or funny about what I'm saying," she asserted firmly. "If you won't listen to me by myself, we'll wake up Lee Martin and see if he can influence you, although there's no need to drag him into it."

Patiently, as though trying to explain something to a child, Joe Leander attempted once more to make clear his position to this charming girl who had been drawn so strangely into the whirl of New York's latest gang war.

"If you'll keep Lee Martin out of this and stay out yourself, too, you'd be a lot happier," he pronounced. "This trouble goes back a good many years with a good many men on both sides. You can't dash down here in one night and hope to settle anything. If you would only listen to reason!"

"I don't have to listen to any of your kind of reasoning to know what is right and what is wrong," she responded vigorously. "Why, if you were even an intelligent gangster, you'd retire from the scene of battle to-night. One of two things is certain to happen to you if you don't: either you'll be arrested, or if you prowl around where McGuire's men are, they'll shoot you. If McGuire has determined to wipe out the leader of your faction, don't you suppose he's watching and on the alert?"

This, Joe realized, was surprisingly accurate. It amazed him that this delightful girl of wealth and culture could give such sane advice.

He looked at her and his heart began to swell and expand again. Apparently, she had little or no interest in the fact that McGuire held gambling I. O. U.'s signed by Lee Martin; that McGuire was blackmailing her fiancé, and that the prospect of her marriage to the man she loved faced utter disaster unless those notes were recovered.

THE disturbing thought came to Joe that even if McGuire should die to-night by a bullet, Lee Martin's notes would undoubtedly pass into other hands equally unscrupulous; the blackmailing would continue until Martin was hounded beyond human endurance.

It was useless to try to get Eleanor to see all of this. Every emotion Joe Leander possessed had been played upon to-night until he was bruised and aching inside, beneath his cool demeanor.

Out of the welter of feeling, one line of certainty stood forth clearly, as plain as a black mark drawn straight across a sheet of white paper. Lee Martin had saved Joe from the electric chair and

thereby earned deathless gratitude; Lee Martin was engaged to marry Eleanor Giddings, whose attraction for Joe was so strong that he was scarcely his own master. The truth was that Joe lived and had his being now in a state of devotion unbelievably fanatical, wildly chivalrous.

To recover Martin's notes from McGuire was the last service and the greatest which he could perform for these two people who touched great mysterious chords of loyalty and devotion in the deepest caverns of his being. Despite the coldness of the night his head was burning, there was no moisture in his mouth.

"No matter what you might want to do to-night, there is probably nothing you can do," Eleanor told him. "If I get you past this night, I'll feel better. Can't you see how much worry and unhappiness you bring me? And Lee Martin, too. You say you care a lot about both of us, yet—"

Against his will, despite his tensed resolution, Joe was conscious suddenly that she was using up his power of resistance. He was like an ice floe in the river, breaking up bit by bit. How could he, when she commanded all of his possible love, stop his ears longer against her pleadings?

"All right!" he burst out suddenly, his voice jarring with the irritation of defeat. "I promise you. I won't see McGuire or anything to-night. I'll go back to the hotel and sleep in the room I rented. Does that satisfy you?"

"No, I won't be satisfied until you give up this whole terrible business," she returned. "But I certainly feel a lot better. Can I depend on that promise?"

"Any time I give you my word I keep it, as long as I live," he informed her. "If you let me send you to your

hotel in a taxi, I'll drop around and see my business partner for a few minutes and then, on my word of honor, I'll go uptown. You won't have a thing on earth to worry about as far as to-night is concerned. You're the greatest girl on earth and I'm not trying to make you miserable—I'm trying to make you happy, though God knows it's a tough proposition."

Somewhere back in the ancestry of Eleanor Giddings was a shrewd, hard strain and business instinct. She knew how to accept a minor advantage without going after the whole thing immediately and greedily. Listening closely to all she had to say, she walked along closely at his side. Once or twice she nodded comprehendingly.

"Don't worry," she said; "all of this can be worked out for the happiness of everybody concerned. Take me to a taxicab and I'll go straight back to my hotel."

"I think it's great, that you take my word at its face value!" he ejaculated.

"Why, of course I take your word," she said, looking at him with her clear blue eyes. "There's one thing more, though: in the morning when you wake up, will you telephone me the first thing?"

Joe nodded. "I'll do that."

She gave him her slim gloved hand and there was a quick understanding pressure between them. Then very quickly, she stepped into a taxicab and was gone.

SLOWLY, for he had a whole lifetime before him, Joe made his way inconspicuously along the lonesome streets. There was no need now, he realized, to hurry about anything; it would take some time to clarify his thoughts, to arrange his intentions in logical sequence. As soon as possible

he wanted to see his partner, Ed Fontella; news of Zelig's death, by this time, had probably reached the room where Ed, as the active partner of the combination, operated their rather profitable stuss games. At an all-night drug store Joe entered a telephone booth and the level, guarded voice of Ed Fontella answered him.

"I'm locking the place up right now," Ed said. "Meet me right away at Adolph's."

Adolph's was a friendly, quiet little restaurant that kept open all night on Avenue A, an unsuspecting hide-away from the whirlpool of gang activities. At this late hour only a few patrons were present, pasty-faced night birds, but of harmless species.

Ed Fontella arrived, a dark, squat figure, stolid and impassive of countenance except for an unusual glitter in his dark eyes. Joe had been waiting for him at a rear table; the news of Zelig's murder had spread rapidly, and had set aflame the passions of every man who had been bound to the dead leader by fear, or greed or, occasionally, loyalty.

Behind the hard mask of Fontella's surly face was a growing, excited passion. Ordinarily his single interest in life had been the profit of his stuss game; in the crisis, however, he had instantly generated as much vicious energy as any man now under the half-masted Zelig banner.

"Don't worry, kid, we'll see dem McGuires an' see 'em plenty," he growled immediately to Joe. "We gotta show 'em we're stronger than ever. If we don't clean 'em up right away, they'll try to get us on the run. We'll give Tony the biggest and grandest funeral this town ever seen, an' then we'll get busy."

"I wanted to talk to you about it,"

Joe responded. "I don't want to see the boys get themselves in wrong by a lot of wild, reckless stuff. Right now the McGuires are organized and we ain't."

"An' I want to tell you," Ed Fontella shot back, "that *you* gotta take charge where Tony Zelig left off. You was his right hand man, Joe, an' you're the leader now. From to-night on, it ain't the Little Tony Zelig mob any more, it's the Joe Leander mob!"

Just for an instant Joe had a vision of what that meant. It meant power, fame, big bundles of dough. It meant the authority to dispense life or death, to live dangerously and enjoy all the fruits of lawless command. No king on earth possessed such absolute power over his subjects and enemies as a successful gang leader. In the end, of course, in all probability there would be the bump-off and death in a pool of blood; but that was a black vision a gangster always blotted out of his mind.

"You deserve it, an' it's all yours, Joe," Ed Fontella urged. "The boys all like you an' they know you'd have been Tony's choice if he could have said the word. But you gotta work fast, kid. You gotta step right in an' take charge before anybody else does. Call a meeting, get 'em together an' act like it was all in the bag for you to be the boss."

JOE knew exactly how to do it without Ed Fontella's advice. But a wave of revulsion passed through him. His mouth drew down at the corners. No, the idea didn't quite click—not after he had known Eleanor Giddings.

"If I don't take it, Ed," he asked, "who do you think will step into Tony's shoes?"

The glittering eyes of Ed Fontella never left Joe's face.

"If you don't take it, kid, then I'll tell you who does. I'll take it myself—me, Ed Fontella. You're the only man on earth I'd let stand between me an' Tony's shoes."

A surge of relief, a letting down of the strain, came to Joe. He lit a cigarette and exhaled slowly.

"Congratulations, Ed. You're elected. Now all you gotta do is to make the rest of the mob believe you're the boss."

"Whassa matter, Joe? Are you giving it up because you like me—or is there something else?"

A loneliness, a hunger, a desolate fatigue was eating with increasing voracity at the vitals of Joe Leander. There was only one man alive upon whose friendship and loyalty he could count, and that man was Ed Fontella. Nine-tenths of Ed's nature was bad, but one-tenth was loyal with a rudimentary morality.

That one-tenth of virtue made him a pal; and never before had Joe so needed the understanding friendship of some one who was for him, right or wrong. To-night he needed sharply the relief to be obtained only by pouring his thoughts into the ear of a confidant.

"I don't want to take Tony Zelig's place, Ed," he admitted. "In fact, I'm thinking of getting out of the mob altogether."

"Since when did you get that idea?" Fontella demanded acutely.

"I been feeling this way for quite awhile, but I've just about made up my mind to-night to chuck it."

"Because they bumped Tony? Don't tell me you'd let a thing like that get your goat, Joe." Ed's brows raised incredulously. "Oh, I know it was tough,

happening practically right before your eyes, but you can't make me believe a thing like that would scare you off."

"No, I told Tony before they got him that I was thinking of pulling out. I used to think all of this was a soft, sweet way of getting by, but where's the future in it? There's plenty of dough, sure; but I don't think my skin is thick enough to keep me happy down here much longer."

Ed Fontella's eyes glistened shrewdly.

"It's that dame you been running around wit'!" he spat out flatly.

Joe started to answer, to relieve his suppressed emotion for Eleanor Giddings by telling Ed Fontella how wonderful, how marvelous she was. But, all at once, he found that he simply could not discuss her with Ed. She was too fine, too immaculate in his fervid imagination, to be the subject of conversation with a guy like Ed. It did not involve any snobbish contempt for Ed, either. Ed Fontella was a pretty good bird in his own way, but he was like all the rest of Joe's pals—all hard and on the make. Easy money, easy women; that was the only combination they understood.

"It ain't no dame that changed me," he told Ed. "I'm not going to run out at a time like this, though. I've got to settle with McGuire first. After that, I think I'm through."

THE aroused suspicion of Ed Fontella clung tenaciously to the theory that a woman was responsible for the new ideas of Joe's. The dark scowl on his face grew black.

"I appreciate the break you're giving me when you step out, but it don't look so good to see you falling for this society stuff, kid. Some of the boys saw you with her to-night and they

spotted her for one of them high-hat molls. I suppose she handed you a line about what a great guy you happen to be, eh?"

"Suppose we leave her out of it?" Joe remarked.

"I wish to hell we could leave her out of it!" Ed Fontella retorted. "Not for my sake; I'll get along all right; but I hate to see anybody make a rummy out of you. Oh, sure, she might give you a tumble now while you're new to her, but you ought to know that guys like you an' me are only a laugh to that ritzy mob. Better lay off before she drives you nutty, kid."

Joe got up, reaching for his hat and coat. All animation had died from his face and he turned the brim of his hat down until his eyes were deeply shadowed.

"If you're going to take charge of the mob you'd better get in touch with some of 'em before morning and snap 'em into line," he told Ed Fontella crisply. "I'll see you to-morrow."

Fontella's lids batted over his shining eyes in surprise.

"Ain't you comin' home wit' me?" he demanded. For several years they had rented a flat together; true, they used it for little more than sleeping purposes, but there had been in Joe's tone something that hinted vaguely that the arrangement was at an end. "D'ye mean you are goin' to move out on me?" Ed demanded in amazement.

Joe's annoyance quickly evaporated; he thought with a measure of affection of the callous comradeship that Ed Fontella had always given him. If all the guys in the mob resembled Fontella, he realized, it would be a better outfit. Whatever his faults, there was none of the treacherous rat strain in Ed. He was just tough; tough to the bone.

"Don't get sore at me, Ed," Joe said

seriously. "I've got to handle myself in my own way, the same as you have. We'll always be pals whatever happens. Only, please don't try to argue with me."

Fontella made an involuntary motion as though to shake hands, then checked it. He realized that something momentous and extraordinary was happening in his relationship with Joe Leander. It surprised him to realize how much he thought of the kid.

"Okay wit' me, Joe," he said, a curious thickness in his voice. "Sure, we'll always be pals." He started to say more, but his throat tightened and he became inarticulate.

CHAPTER X.

SURPRISES.

WHEN Joe awoke in the Shenandoah Hotel the next morning, his room was bright with clear winter sunshine that told him he had slept well past the middle of the morning. He bathed, dressed, and remembered he had promised to call Eleanor Giddings. This he undertook to do, but without any intention of being swayed by her to-day.

His object, principally, was to protect himself from the inevitable pain of a hopeless fascination, prolonged under the absurd theory that there could be any comfortable friendship between them. It had to be all or nothing; and it was the latter.

Joe knew, deep in his heart, that it was only self-torture to give rein to his feelings; therefore, he preferred a sudden wrench and have it over with. Still, when he heard her voice on the phone, his heart began to beat with anguishing excitement that threatened to topple all of his strong resolutions

to serve her with only good deeds and distant chivalry.

"Did you keep your promise to me last night?" she asked, and he assured her he had, obtaining a full night's sleep in the bargain. "I've been trying to reach Lee Martin this morning on the phone, but so far I've missed him," she went on, her voice alive with distinctive personality. "What are you going to do to-day? Can't you come up here and see me now?"

It would be useless and necessarily painful for him to see her, he realized. Her only intention was to dissuade him from any determined action against Horse McGuire; she meant well, but, being a woman, was incapable of understanding. Deliberately, he decided to stall her off.

"After what happened last night," he said, "I had better duck out of town for a day or two. You know how it is; safety first."

She was silent for a moment or two. Then, "I'm not going back to Boston right away. When you come back, will you communicate with me here?"

"I'll do that," he agreed. "And don't worry about anything. Tell Martin not to worry, either. Everything's going to be all right."

When he hung up the receiver he was reluctant to hear the last of her voice. It irritated him, this persistent attraction she had for him. It was as strong to-day as it had been yesterday. She was a great girl, but there was no use letting her get his goat completely.

"A guy that gets nutty over a girl is just a plain boob!" he told himself fiercely.

A rapping sounded on his door and he started nervously. Maybe the police had traced him to this hotel. The cops did surprising things sometimes. His revolver was on the dresser. Quickly

he thrust it under the mattress. No use risking a violation of the Sullivan Law.

But it was Helen Reed, the black-bobbed girl he had met last night in Harrison Howe's suite, who stood before the door when he opened it.

"Good morning," she said agreeably. "Have you had your breakfast yet?"

He was surprised, but was half-mechanically pleased at her friendliness.

"No, I haven't had breakfast," he returned inattentively.

"You can come over to my room and have some toast and coffee with me," she said, surprisingly. "I would enjoy having you—besides you could tell me all the lowdown on the Zelig murder."

INSTANTLY he was tensely alert. "I don't know what you're talking about!"

"Yes, you know very well what I'm talking about," she said quietly. "In case you haven't seen the morning papers, you probably don't know that one of them printed a picture of Tony Zelig taken last summer down at Coney Island on the beach. It's a picture of Tony Zelig and, the paper says, his lieutenant, Joe Leander. I remember your name from last night, of course, and there's no doubt about the face. It's you."

There was no suggestion of criticism in her small, agreeable face with its soft dark eyes and pert nose. An incongruous thought, totally out of keeping with his disturbing situation, passed across Joe's mind; her mouth was like a warm rosebud. He was disconcerted, briefly irritated, that he even noticed the girl as an individual.

Suddenly it seemed to him that he, after all, lacked stability. It was strange that he should be intrigued, ever so

slightly, by Helen Reed's attention to him. It was true, of course, that he was sharply interested in the disturbing newspaper publicity; he did not understand that the weight of Zelig's murder and his hopeless love for Eleanor might account for a momentary subconscious effort at escape through this girl's friendliness.

The idea of his picture in the paper carried an unpleasant sting of danger.

"Let me look at that newspaper, will you?" he asked.

"Sure. I get the paper sent up every morning to my room. You may come in."

He locked his door and followed her, mentally deciding to leave quickly; he thought, as he walked behind Helen Reed's sinuous form, that she was as definitely feminine as Eleanor, yet with some magic spark lacking.

"I got a percolator and an electric toaster," she volunteered, when they were inside. "We're not supposed to cook in the rooms but some of the girls bring stuff in under their coats. It's quite homelike."

"If you'll let me have that newspaper," he remarked. "I guess I better be moving; I got to see a man downtown."

"Why, you haven't stopped a minute," she objected. "Look, the coffee's bubbling. With your picture in the paper and everything—you're a celebrity now. Aren't you proud?"

Proud! A thin, bitter smile came to his lips. A lot he had to be proud about! The sweep of his gaze took in the neat little room, the feminine touch of toilet articles and a dressed French doll on the bureau. He found a comfortable chair and lit a cigarette. Helen Reed handed him the newspaper and busied herself with cups and plates from a closet.

The Zelig murder, as the newspapers called it, had been reported with sensational incompleteness. As usual, mystery surrounded the killing. There was no real clew. A highly incorrect biography of Tony Zelig was printed with an account of his activities written by a person who obviously had no familiarity with them. The police knew no more than the surface facts and the reporters knew less. Arrests were promised shortly.

Joe's attention centered on the photograph of himself and Zelig.

The two of them were in white flannels and wore black and white sport shoes; the beach photographer had snapped them without their hats, which accounted for the clear view of their faces. Evidently the detectives or, perhaps reporters, had ransacked Zelig's apartment and found the picture shortly after Joe and Eleanor had left. He scanned through the newspaper article again, but there was no mention of his name, except a brief note that he had been identified in the picture by a detective who *knew him* by sight.

"YOU look harmless enough, but I guess you're a pretty tough egg, at that," Helen Reed remarked.

"I thought you were a nice fellow last night, but you're something to cry over to-day. I can hardly believe it. You look almost like a gentleman, too."

An innocent cheerfulness took some of the bluntness out of her words. Joe put down the paper and sat smoking, indifferently studying Helen Reed.

She was as pretty this morning as she had been last night. At the tiny electric toaster, she was pleasingly domestic. He remembered she had spoken of her lonesomeness and he wondered why things were that way with her.

Her soft youth was tender, contain-

ing a freshness, a fragrance, like a young flower; she did not correspond at all with the general opinion that theatrical girls were hard and artificial.

A new interest began to grow within him.

It was pleasant to feel that here was a girl, wise to the ways of life and engaged in the difficult racket of show business, who yet retained a mysterious integrity. A satisfaction grew from her apparent liking for him. She didn't have the class of Eleanor, of course, but she was head and shoulders above the girls that queened it among the Zelig mob.

The situation, and the spontaneous friendliness of Helen Reed, appealed to Joe; he instantly responded to her easy disregard of artificial conventions. The struggling aspiration for some indefinite growing decency took possession of him and he felt that he was on a higher plane than usual.

"With your chances for making friends, I don't see why you have to be lonesome," he commented.

He moved his chair to permit the placing of a tiny drop-leaf table. Closer, she was even more attractive; the dark cropped hair glistened and the skin of her face and throat was creamy.

"They got enough wild women on Broadway without me adding one more," she informed him. "I could have plenty of whoopee pals if I wanted them, but that stuff is the flamingo, so far as I'm concerned. Besides, I'm going to keep my health and pep for the stage. I got the stuff the public wants and some day I'll step out of the chorus and start playing parts."

"Atta girl! You can't keep a good man down," Joe applauded her. "What I can't understand, though, is why you gave me a tumble. You say

you are careful about your friends and you pick out me, a guy the cops will be looking for, to be nice to."

Helen Reed, putting a plate of toast on the table, was nearer him than she had been before.

"Oh, you!" she cried softly. "You can't fool me. You're not a hard-boiled egg at all. You're perfectly harmless."

Her words brought to him an intangible warning as though the stamp of some unguessed absurdity was upon him.

He felt again as he had felt when he was a weak, helplessly sensitive child of the streets. The carefully acquired roughness, the illusion of ferocity, which was the badge of his high position in the Zelig mob, was as nothing to this young unimpressed girl. But he summoned all the familiar hardness of his manner, the cold, skeptical twist of the mouth.

"Yeah? So you think I'm a sap, eh?"

"**W**ELL, not a sap exactly," she replied unruffled. "Still, I guess a fellow is a sap at that, if he never gets wise to himself. You might try to act tough, but just as I told you, you are almost a gentleman. You are merely a make-believe gangster."

"So you think I'm a make-believe gangster, do you?" he queried, in a forced tone.

"I think you're fine," she said pleasantly. "I knew right away when I met you last night that you were nice. That's why I talked to you. As soon as you find yourself, you'd be quite a solid man. Do you think I'm too fresh?"

"No, you're okay," he told her, helplessly.

She smiled, and her self-assured sincerity took all of the rasp out of what she had been saying.

"We'll eat now," she stated. "We've talked about you. Now let's talk about me."

She told him a little about herself, in a voice that was soft but rippling and clear.

To-day being Sunday, she was not required to attend rehearsal. She was alive with ambition, but she was determined, she announced, not to go to extremes to woo success.

"I'm in the hardest business there is," she said. "But there is always a way to advance if you keep plugging."

Before he had a chance to become bored with her account of her personal struggle, she shifted the conversation and talked with serious intelligence about the theater and theatrical people. The real people of the stage, she declared, always gave more to the public than they received in return. It was the most exacting of professions; the greatest stars led lives more laborious than any workman's; they were creatures of stern discipline in their daily lives.

Joe was interested and surprised. "That's news to me. I thought it was a wild life."

"The bums don't get very far up the ladder," she explained. "They don't last long; a year or two and they drop out of sight. There's not one big man or woman in the theater who is really wild. But it's useless trying to make the public at large believe that."

With an effort, Joe broke the spell of this pleasant interlude. Having breakfast with Helen Reed had given him temporary surcease from his jangled nerves. He left her, a little more

sure of himself than before. Something in his ego had been soothed.

CHAPTER XI.

A LONG GAMBLE.

HORSE M'GUIRE was in the highest possible spirits. In the first place, and most important of all, there was not a vestige of evidence to connect him or his henchmen with the murder of Tony Zelig. They had meant to bump off Joe Leander at the same time, but his escape was a minor disappointment that could be corrected later.

The main object to McGuire's scheming for the past month had been attained—he was rid of the dominance of Zelig. The next step was to bring Zelig's followers into line and unite them with his own small, but efficient, organization.

At the head of these merged interests would be the brawny, brutalized figure of Horse McGuire himself. It looked, for a fact, as if there wasn't a cloud in the sky.

The satisfied grin had been on McGuire's huge bony face all morning. Not a drinking man as a rule, he nevertheless felt to-day that his fortunes required a little steady celebrating.

With him in the square room that adjoined his gambling establishment on the floor above his restaurant, were his two best men. They were curiously alike, these two: Kid Blood and Billy the Goat. Both were dapper and well set-up; both had dark, vernal faces and shrewd, narrow eyes. Oddly, almost like a jeer, each wore in the lapel of his coat a crimson carnation. The floral decoration meant nothing beyond a touch of dandyism in these two young men. McGuire himself scorned any

foppishness, but he did not object to it in others.

The trio, with quiet satisfaction, were taking their celebration leisurely from a quart bottle of genuine Scotch that was flanked by three glasses on a green-topped poker table. There was no haste in this drinking, for they were gentlemen at ease and therefore above the crude ribaldry of their inferiors.

Ceremoniously, his big hand wrapped around the bottle, McGuire poured equal portions into the three glasses. A derisive smile was still on his harsh mouth, but his stony eyes were cold. Despite other marked differences in their appearance, his frigid stare resembled Zelig's bloodless gaze.

"Happy days," McGuire declared solemnly. "Every day from now on ought to be happy for you two guys." Then he added with increasing seriousness: "if you behave yourselves."

Both pairs of dark eyes opposite him looked up with instant repudiation of the suggested insubordination.

"We got sense enough for that!" exclaimed Kid Blood, and simultaneously Billy the Goat declared, "Every day in the week, Horse."

"You guys know how I do business," McGuire went on, his voice edged with menace. "Still, I'm going to give you both responsibilities and it might go to your heads. What happened to Tony Zelig can happen to either of you, if necessary. Don't ever forget that, boys, and you'll find me easy to deal with as long as you give me your best. But you're not going to get anywhere at all unless there's one mind that runs everything. You two have got to be with me heart and soul."

His pair of lieutenants spontaneously lifted their glasses and clinked them against the glass McGuire held in his big fist. With mutual assurance of

their incorruptible fidelity, Kid Blood and Billy the Goat pledged themselves to the baron.

KID BLOOD possessed a mind a trifle quicker than his fellow minion, Billy. There was a glassy look about his eyes not possessed by Billy the Goat.

"I hope this is the last time, Horse, that you will ever think that you've got to say a suspicious word to me," Kid Blood said, his voice under emotion becoming almost soprano. "Last night, who was it put the first shot into Zelig—and the last? Who was it went out and led the boys? Who took ninety-nine per cent of the risk?"

"You only done what I told you to," McGuire returned stolidly. "I've already showed you how I appreciate it. Any time you do something for me, you get it back ten times over in money and other things."

Kid Blood was high-strung; his nervous system was almost defective. This discussion, which left McGuire unmoved sent a dark tide of color into his swarthy face. Being of the true killer breed, he always was lashed into passions by any discussion of his specialty. One of his hands on the table shook visibly; he clenched his fist and ground it against the green top as he leaned forward, his eyes narrow.

"I ain't thinking about any reward I got!" he said, his voice singing. "I'm telling you I do my work when the time comes. I'm never sloppy! If you don't know it by now, you never will!"

With a stony eye that held Kid Blood's temperament in check, McGuire deliberately poured another drink all around.

"What you say is true enough," he stated. "It wasn't your fault that

Leander didn't get on the spot along with Zelig. How soon do you think you can give Leander the bump?"

"Give me a week," Kid Blood rapped out.

McGuire made a downward crescent of his mouth, thoughtfully.

"Make it sooner than that, if possible," he pronounced. "With Zelig out, Leander is about the only man able to handle the old mob. That's why I want him rubbed out before he can take charge."

At the same moment, a young man, tall, erect, walked into Horse McGuire's restaurant, and passed through an inner door, and up the stairs leading to a floor above. That he should arrive in this place at all was the height of rash conduct, but it was no degree whatever a coincidence. His presence was the result of sheer steady determination.

That Joe Leander should arrive during Horse McGuire's conference with Kid Blood and Billy the Goat had the perfect dovetailed smoothness as though some unseen craftsman had arranged it all. Joe was fairly certain that McGuire, at this hour, would be in his office room upstairs. He heard voices beyond the door, and with the barest moment of hesitation, he let his hand fall upon the knob and politely entered.

The advantage of surprise was in Joe's favor. Appearing thus suddenly before his three enemies, his unexpected presence caught them mentally off balance; they were shocked, astonished, overwhelmed not so much by Joe's audacity as by his startling physical reality.

None of the three moved from his chair; their eyes remained fixed upon Joe's face with a curious, silent intensity.

"I want to see you, McGuire—about business," Joe said quickly. His nerves were taut as the strings of a banjo, but there was a solid core of ice on his chest. The dark face with the high cheek bones was clean-cut, alert with stone-like hardness. "I mean personal business, McGuire,"

"The hell you say!" McGuire articulated.

HIS face changed from muddy darkness to a pasty pallor, his mouth was open, his eyes were staring. An instinct of self-preservation sent him fumbling toward the usual place of his gun holstered under his coat, but, too late, he remembered he was not armed. Nor did Kid Blood or Billy the Goat, at the moment, possess a weapon.

As a matter of fact, this had been a private, harmonious conference, and gangsters, in the sanctity of their pleasant councils, do not always bring along their tools. McGuire's reaching for his gun had been instinctive, but realizing the futility of the gesture, his hand reappeared with a cigar from his vest pocket.

It was a weak deception and he felt a little ridiculous.

Joe's hand had instantly closed about the handle of his own weapon under his coat; his eyes were everywhere and he could have drawn and shot faster than any man in the room. It was not his purpose, however, he thought coolly, to fire if it could be avoided.

"You got a nerve," McGuire said hoarsely.

In Joe's imagination there seemed about McGuire the smell of death like the odor of acrid cartridge smoke. Joe banished the somber fancy. He was conscious of the keenness of his own repressed excitement.

8 A

"Don't worry about my nerve," he voiced. "I'm not here to see you guys about anything connected with Tony Zelig. It's a business matter. You hold some of Lee Martin's I. O. U.'s, don't you?"

"To the amount of fifteen grand," McGuire informed him, with malevolent steadiness.

The amount exceeded Joe's expectation. There was no possible way he could raise such a sum immediately. In his pocket he carried five thousand dollars, his entire capital, withdrawn today from the bank.

Despite his desperate resolution to recover the obligations that stood as a sordid obstacle to Eleanor's marriage with Lee Martin, Joe was confronted with a preposterous task. McGuire, undoubtedly, had the signed slips locked away safely. Any attempt to gain them by force would be inviting certain catastrophe. The undertaking required skill and luck. Joe was aware of only one vulnerable spot in McGuire's armor—his well known willingness to gamble on anything.

"I got a private reason for wanting to take up Lee Martin's paper," he told the enemy. "Martin is in a bad money fix and you might have a lot of trouble collecting from him no matter how strong you go after him. Are you willing to listen to a gambling proposition, McGuire?"

Kid Blood and Billy the Goat hunched their chairs closer to the table, close up behind McGuire's. Their eyes, coldly fixed, were watching Joe.

"Spill it!" said McGuire.

JOE kept his voice casual: "I brought five grand with me. You're a mighty good hand with the cards, Horse, but I'll discount that. I'll put my dough up right now against Mar-

tin's I. O. U.'s, and we'll deal a cold hand to see who takes the pot. Are you game enough to gamble?"

A leering grin disfigured McGuire's mouth. "Do you think I'm sucker enough to gamble fifteen grand against five?"

Martin's paper ain't worth fifteen grand in cold cash, and you know it," Joe returned. "Maybe in time and with a lot of trouble you might get that much out of it, but it's risky. My dough is real and I got it with me here and now. If you win you'll still have the I. O. U.'s, and my five grand beside."

A gleam of avarice disturbed McGuire's gaze momentarily. "We just been talking about what a smart fellow you are," he remarked. "You got a lot of gall, too. You want me to put up fifteen grand against your five. That makes the odds three to one in your favor."

"I'm betting real money, not flimsy paper," Joe remarked.

Horse McGuire hesitated, his greed formulating slowly a plan in his mind. Violence was all right in its place, but here, almost within his grasp, was a tempting lump sum of money. In these matters of guile, he felt sure, Joe Leander was nowhere near his equal.

"Now, let's see if we can't be fair about this arrangement," McGuire suggested, affecting cordiality. "Let's make the odds even. I'm to put up three dollars to your one—you ought to give me three chances to one to win. I tell you what I'll do, Leander; we'll put up the stake and deal four hands of poker. One to you, one to me, and one each to Kid Blood and Billy the Goat."

Joe grew silent, enveloped in thought. The odds would be against him, and if he lost the whole of his purpose would perish with a crash.

Still, if luck was at his side he could win; if he refused to take the chance, the coveted I. O. U.'s were as far away from him as ever.

"All right, Horse," he agreed suddenly. "You're a hard man to do business with."

McGuire, while he did not stop to display a false hospitality, pushed the bottle to Billy the Goat.

"Give us a drink all around," he ordered shortly.

An extra glass was procured and the liquor disposed of without any lying assurances of tender regards. A fourth chair was pulled up to the table, and McGuire, opening a drawer, produced a pack of cards. His hands, Joe observed, were deft and quick, despite their size.

"We can get it over with in two minutes," Horse declared, shuffling the pack. "Poker hands all around and anybody can have a regular draw. We'll show down and the highest wins."

"Okay wit' me," Joe agreed, but as McGuire started to deal, he put out a protesting hand: "Wait a minute, Horse. High cards gets the deal."

"Foxy, ain't you?" McGuire sneered; nevertheless he dexterously spread the cards across the table and each drew a card. The deal fell to Joe.

"Wise boy has all the luck," said Kid Blood sarcastically.

"Wise boy don't look so lucky to me," jibed Billy the Goat. "If he was lucky, he wouldn't be here."

"YOU two guys talk too much," Horse McGuire rebuked them.

"Get ahead with your deal Leander. What we want is results."

Joe had gathered the cards before him in a neat pack, but left them un-

touched. He reached in his trouser pocket and pulled out a folded packet of five hundred dollar bills which he put beside the cards.

"Let's have the stake in sight, McGuire," he demanded. "The color of my money goes against the color of your I. O. U.'s."

"Hell, you'd get the stuff if you won!" blurted his opponent.

Nevertheless he went to a small safe across the room and returned with a little sheaf of white papers which he dropped carelessly in the center of the table.

"You can count 'em over if you like," he said carelessly, "but it ain't necessary. The whole thing is there. Fifteen grand."

Instinctively Joe knew the man was telling the truth and he tossed his own bills on top of the I. O. U.'s. "You don't have to count that money, either," he remarked. "You can take my word for it; it's five grand."

McGuire accepted Joe's word without hesitation.

A tense silence hung over the table as Joe shuffled and put the pack before Kid Blood to his right for the cut. Dealing, he distributed the cards swiftly.

Horse McGuire looked at his hand with an enigmatic eye; Kid Blood exhibited a rising fever in his shining eyes; his long fingers were like tallow, a deep spot of faint flush appeared on either swarthy cheek.

"I'll take two," he said with dry lips as he discarded. Billy the Goat demanded a single card.

"None for me," declared Horse McGuire.

Joe studied his hand for a moment and decided that he was not likely to improve it. "I'm set," he said.

"Let's see what you hold, Billy," McGuire demanded. A pair of deuces and a pair of nines was the best Billy the Goat had to offer when he threw down his hand.

"At least I can top that!" cried Kid Blood; he exhibited three tens.

Joe looked at McGuire and the latter tossed down his cards. "I win wit' three jacks," he grunted.

He moved his large, supple paw toward the money, but Joe shot out a hand and dropped it over the stake on the table.

"Full house! Three nines and a pair of deuces!"

The overpowering luck that had given him the winning hand left the others stunned for an instant. His grasp closed, crumpling the bills and the I. O. U.'s together. At the same time he was rising to his feet. Kid Blood cursed viciously under his breath; in the moment of short silence that followed, Joe tensed himself, eyed the distance to the door.

"You made your own rules, McGuire," he remarked, "and I won fair and square."

The three others, too, were on their feet. Billy the Goat was quietly edging between Joe and the door.

"You won wit' the cards all right," McGuire remarked. "Now what makes you think you're going to walk out of here wit' the stuff?"

If he was going to get out at all, Joe realized, it would be another miracle of luck. His hand closed instantly over the grip of his revolver. But, before he could level it, his wrist was seized from behind by the two hands of Billy the Goat and the weapon was instantly in the center of four struggling pairs of hands as each man in the room tried to get it.



"Six bucks or nothin', hey? Guess I gave
him all of the nothin'."

Ballyhooey

*There's nothing new under the sun—but under the calcium glare, two
medicine show spielers invent a fast one*

By THOMAS THURSDAY

HONEST, each time I read or hear about some of them top of the ladder birds who break down and confess that they owe their success to hard work and brain racking study, I let out a whinny of amusement and a polite hiccup. Believe it or not, Mr. Ripley, there *is* such a thing as the "breaks" in life, and never kid yourself about that!

Don't get me wrong: I ain't saying that any square and upright boothblack or stevedore can become president of

the Collapse and Bust Radio Corporation without a little training and a dime's worth of education. But I am saying that there's many a bright lad and lassie who would now be sitting on top of the world if given the right break by old Frank Q. Fate.

For a concrete example of the above lecture, take the case of "Ballyhoo" Burns and his little playmate, Jack Hoke. I know plenty about Mons. Burns, and as for Mr. Hoke, I have followed his career since birth. See-

ing that I'm Jack Hoke, to follow his career was no trouble at all.

By this time you are probably wondering if we are the famous vaudeville team of Burns and Hoke, who played over the Coast-to-Coast Circuit for the past year in their side-splitting act, "The World's Greatest Remedy." Well, good people, we are no less than the same, and if you have not caught our act in person, we have prob'ly annoyed you over the radio or in the squawkies. And you should get a glimpse of our fan mail, fellow citizens!

Speaking of getting the breaks, I will admit that in all our interviews that has appeared in the magazines and newspapers, me and Burns stressed the point that we owed our great success to hard work, constant study, and "the little woman." As to the latter, I will confess that Ballyhoo's wife wunst sewed a button on his pyjamas, while the aim of my for-better-or-worse has been bad in the ten attempts she's made to bean me with the coffeepot, which may have saved my life.

Well, to put some pepper into a salty story, it was while me and Ballyhoo was touring God's own country—Chamber of Commerce slang for the West—that we got the break that took us out of the grit-and-gravy class and put us where we could buy caviar by the ton. We had joined out with a duck-the-sheriff five car carnival with the appetizing name of McSwenson and O'Berg's World of Joy Shows, but all we collected from it was a headache. No fooling, if Jesse James and the Younger Brothers were acing around to-day they would own a carnival just half as bad as that trick was!

Anyway, we trouped with this outfit until the sheriff of Boots Cañon, New Mexico, attached everything but

McSwenson's goatee and O'Berg's rubber check book. It lasted four weeks, a miracle, during which hectic time Ballyhoo worked a spindle-wheel joint while I barked in front of Bon-nee-tah, the Bom-bay Snake Char-mah, who's real name was Sadie Murphy. She wunst got a glimpse of India in a news reel, and thought it was Surf Avenue, Coney Island.

WHEN the sheriff and his playmates swooped down upon the show, me and Ballyhoo sneaked out midst the sagebrush and counted up our net wealth, the same amounting to six bucks and ten megs.

"New Yawk," says Ballyhoo, "must be two thousand miles away."

"That," I says, "is no news to Rand-McNally. What else do you know?"

"You see before you Dr. Malcolm De Lancey Clemm, P. S., R. F. D., late—very late—Fellow of the Royal Academy of Medicine of South Patagonia."

"How much," I asks, scenting the plot, "are you going to charge a bottle?"

"That all depends upon the economic condition of the towns and the intelligence of the good people therein. But I think I'm a little out of practice with the old medicine spiel. Stand over there, Jack, and I'll rehearse a bit."

For fifteen minutes Dr. Clemm delivers a fine, boob-smacking lecture on the great merits of "Balmilino," and concludes at offering same at the small, introductory price of one dollar per bottle.

"You ain't gone back none," I applauds. "Why, I bet you could peddle a gross to the American Medical Association."

We heard a train whistle in the distance.

"I think that rattler is headed for Mine Gulch," says Ballyhoo. "Le's make it."

We crash through the brush and meet the train just as she rounds a bend. We hop a flat car with no trouble at all, and would of enjoyed the ride but for the sudden and annoying appearance of a "shack," alias brakeman. This guy comes up from positively nowhere and gives us a mean glare. He's a man of few words, and here's the few:

"Dive off, bums!" he snaps.

"Brother," placates Ballyhoo, "you're mistaken. We ain't bums; we're just out for a little air."

"You mean you're out for a flop into the cactus," snorts our new playmate.

Burns extracts our combined wealth and displays it before the eyes of Mr. Brakie.

"Er, maybe we can get down to business," says Ballyhoo. "Mine Gulch is eighteen miles away, and our shoes ain't so hot. Suppose I give you two bucks to let us ride this Graf Zepelin hither? All we got between us and Broadway is six bones."

"Gimme the six," snaps the shack, advancing to grab it.

"If you scoop it all," counters Ballyhoo, "we won't eat tasty or often."

"Six bucks or nothin'!" snarls our big-hearted boy friend.

"Aw right; come and get it."

Burns makes a bluff at passing the burglar the money with his left hand. When the brakie reached for it, Ballyhoo swung a right uppercut that lifted the gent two feet in the air. When he landed it was in a pile of New Mexico sand.

"Six bucks or nothin', hey?" sniffs

Burns. "Well, I give him all of the nothin'!"

When we reached Mine Gulch, Burns goes into the one and only drug store and buys some thymol, boric and benzoic acid. Noting a few dozen empty bottles on a shelf, covered with five years' worth of dust, Ballyhoo strikes a bargain with the druggist and buys 'em sand cheap. Next, we cross the street and go into the Hairpants Café, a first-rate impure food trap. While we coffee up, Burns gets chummy with ye proprietor, and the first thing you know we are in the kitchen manufacturing Balmilino with the aid of a well-filled rain barrel.

GIVING the boss a sample bottle, with a warning not to use it for ketchup, we wait for the six-fifteen express that runs to Carsonburg, twenty miles to the west. Burns had been told that there was a small opera house in Carsonburg, and he thought he had a act that would hold its attention. We arrive at Carsonburg just as the sun signed off for the day.

Walking down the main drag, we found the Rangers Opera House, a amusement trap that seated about eight hundred customers. It gave two good and rotten shows per week, although the paying patrons didn't know it. The three-sheet strung across the entrance informed one and all that "The Great Train Robbery" was showing within, assisted by a coupla vaudeville acts that New York and Chicago theaters must of passed up as too good.

"Let's go in and see this mess," says Ballyhoo. "I have a idea, and it ought to be a riot."

To make a clean breast of matters, it was!

The show opened with a team entitled McGill and McGall, who tried to

sing and dance, and flopped at both. The audience gave the little boys a hand. The next act was the Marvelous Mysto, who performed a few card tricks, removed a bunny out of a hat, and made some goldfish disappear. I bet Grant and Lee—maybe Columbus—got a kick out of that when it first came around. The third was a sketch, mostly hot, named "Why Delilah Shaved Samson," and if it wasn't a advertisement for safety razors, it wasn't anything. The show closed with the old jumping snap-shots, "The Great Train Robbery," and if you ain't seen that, ask your grandpa to tell you all about it. He must of seen it when he wore a bib. Next week a novelty act: "Uncle Tom's Cabin."

Ballyhoo looks up the manager. His name is "Sideburns" Roscoe, and he looks it. He has a neat set of whiskers on both sides of his face, what I mean.

"I'm Dr. Malcolm De Lancey Clemm," says Ballyhoo. "Meet my associate, Mr. J. Reginald Hoke."

"Uh-huh," says Roscoe with a polite yawn.

"Your show was rotten," goes on Burns.

"Uh-huh."

"If you would care to pack your house at a advance in price, I can arrange it. If you read the theatrical papers you have heard of us. For two years we played all the big time in our sketch, 'Humpty Dumpty Never Fell,' and was a wow. Then we took a little vacation and framed up a bigger and better act, 'The World's Greatest Remedy.' As you probably know, most new acts are tried out in what they call the sticks, before annoying Broadway."

"Sure," says Sideburns, "but what ails yer?"

"Without any cost to you we will give our new act in your house next Wednesday and Saturday. You won't have to shell out a dime. How about it?"

"Tha's about the right price for some p'fawmers," says Mr. Roscoe encouragingly. "Go ahead. The paper comes out wunst a week, Wednesday morning; whut should I tell them to print about yuh?"

"I'll take charge of the editor of the *Sagebrush Clarion*," says Ballyhoo.

LEAVING Roscoe stroking his whiskers, he leads me to the office of the local weekly. He walks in, finds a ringer for Santa Claus with both feet on the desk, and gets down to business.

"If you need some hot news besides them hangings and two-gun brawls," begins Burns, "I'm here to give it to you."

"You wouldn't fool me, would you?" asks the lad with a Times Square accent. This give me and Ballyhoo a jerk. "You shouldn't take advantage of a poor, ignorant editor in the sagebrush country."

"Them whiskers must be false," says Ballyhoo. "Who chiased you away from Jagdad-on-the-Subway?"

"Forget it, big boy," grins Santa. "I'm here because I'm not there, and I think you and me speak the same language. Now, for fifteen dollars—money first, in case of fire—I'll give you a front-page spread, and stand for mayhem, arson, and the complete works of Baron Munchausen. Sold?"

"Brother," says Ballyhoo, "I don't know who you are or why you are shanghaied out here, and I don't care. But I'll shoot square with you: we're just a coupla grifters."

"Make it three," laughs the editor.

"I kidded old Sideburns Roscoe into believing that we were a famous vaudeville team, out here to try out a new act," went on Ballyhoo. "But it ain't a act, it's a racket. I am going to do something never attempted before; I am going to make a high pitch medicine lecture on the stage, and palm it off as a bona fide vaudeville act! In other words, instead of making a regular street corner 'pitch,' I'm gonna do it from the stage."

"I wish you luck," says the editor.

"As to the fifteen dollars, we ain't got it, brother. But I'll leave this watch as security. If the act goes over, I'll come back and claim it."

"Keep the ticker, trouper," says the editor. "If you flop, I'll still eat. Now, what's the line-up for the blurb?"

For ten minutes Ballyhoo tells a story that would of made the Grimm Brothers collapse from envy. According to Mr. Burns, our act had just returned from a world tour, during which kings, queens, and premiers got blisters on their hands from applauding.

"Okay," says the jovial journalist. "I'll give it two columns, and wish you luck."

Leaving the office of the *Sagebrush Clarion*, we go back to our suite of one room at the Hotel La Cactus and talk things over.

"We have a even chance of getting away with it," says Burns. "As to the act, it's as simple as finding pork in a pig. Of course I'll turn the spiel into a burlesque of a old patent medicine faker, and when I near the end, you go down the aisles with a basket of Balmilino and peddle it to the audience at one buck per bottle."

"One of us is crazy," I says polite-

ly. "How are you gonna get the customers to fork up one berry a bottle?"

"Simple," he says. "When I open the act I make a few initial remarks to the effect that, in order for our act to go over right, the audience will have to assist us. How? Listen. When you pass up and down the aisles with the goo, the customers will assist the illusion by buying a bottle. Of course I hint in my remarks that they will get back their dollar when the show is over. Am I clever? Echo: I am."

"Kid," I says, "if you get away with that, you'll be the world's greatest pitchman."

"And then some," he concedes.

COMES Wednesday night. Due to the write-up in the *Sagebrush Clarion* — which was hot — the house was packed like honey in the comb. Two acts preceded us, and then we came on. A ripple of applause greets our announcement card, and the shock almost caused Sideburns Roscoe to swoon. It was the first time any act had received applause ahead of their appearance. Regaining his composure, he notes a basket of Balmilino in the wings, and looks askance.

"Whut's that for?" he demands.

"That," I replies, "is part of the act. Props, see?"

"Uh-huh?" he says, and strokes his whiskers.

The orchestra — a squawky fiddle and a tin-canny and uncanny piano — give us the entrance cue, and Ballyhoo Burns goes out to the footlights and takes a bow. He clears his throat and makes the introductory speech about how the audience should assist the act by buying the Balmilino, *et cetera, et cetera*. Next he launches into one of the funniest burlesque high-pitch medicine spiels ever heard, stating how

Balmilino would cure bunions, ingrown measles, galloping whooping cough, jumping headaches, or which is the main entrance?

"Now, good people," went on Ballyhoo, "my noble assistant will go among you and pass out the world-famed Balmilino at the small, advertising price of one dollar per bottle. Remembah, it's all in fun, and do your share in the entertainment."

I am halfway over the footlights with the basket of ointment when I hear a roar from the wings. A moment later Sideburns Roscoe dashes out, madder than a rooster with buck teeth.

"Yuh can't bluff me," roars Sideburns. "I kinda thought yuh was fakers!"

Burns, taking in the situation at a glance, does some snappy thinking.

"Aha," he declaims to the audience, "here's the sheriff! That's the trouble with this business!"

"Trying to sell wuthless medicine, huh?" raves on Sideburns. "I'll larn yuh bettah!"

He leaps toward Ballyhoo, while the audience, thinking it a part of the act, roars with glee. Honest, it did look natural! Burns steps agilely to one side and permits Sideburns to fall over a chair and land on his beak. Applause from the house. Meantime I go down the aisle peddling Balmilino to the left and right, and, what's more, I'm getting the money.

"Stop, you faker," yelps Sideburns. "Yuh can't make a fool outa me!"

"Trouble with some sheriffs," says Burns to the audience, "is they ain't got no sense of humor."

Sideburns makes another attempt to grab Ballyhoo, but my playmate makes another neat dodge, and Roscoe heads into a prop floor lamp and knocks it

cockeyed. Applause, followed by plenty of laughter.

"Did you ever see such a mad sheriff, folks?" goes on Burns. "I bet his mother raised him on dynamite!"

"Stand and fight!" bellers Sideburns. Then he turns to the wings and yells, "Hey, Orlando! Come here and rope this hombre!"

Out comes Orlando, the genial scene shifter, whirling a lariat around his head.

"Aha," says Burns to the audience, "here comes a deputy! He's gonna do a rope act. Give the little boy a hand!"

I keeps right on selling the goo-goo, working nearer to the door, with the idea of making a quick exit. I knew that Burns was up there stalling off the manager and his scene shifter just to give me time to sell out the bottled boloney, and I was working like all get-out.

"One of them smart Alecks, hey?" snorts Orlando, whirling the lariat in a businesslike manner. "Waal, if I kin rope wild steer, you should be pie!"

He lets the rope fly at Burns. Ballyhoo grabs the floor lamp, holds it up, and Orlando collars it neatly. Applause from the paying patrons.

"Any-buddy else?" I hollers down the aisle. "Balmilino, the World's Greatest Remedy, at only one dollar per bottle. Any-buddy else? Cures coughs, colds, ingrown biceps, cramps in the whiskers, leaping hay fever, or what have you, good people?"

"GET 'im, Orlando!" raves Sideburns. "Get 'im speedy!"

He tries to shoo Burns into a corner to give Orlando a shot with the lariat, but Ballyhoo is a bit too slippery. Orlando, thinking he had Burns in the right position, lets go the rope for the second time. Burns leaps for

the swinging chandelier and the lariat misses his neck from here to Baffin's Bay. And what does that lariat do but circle around the swanlike neck of M. Sideburns. Maybe the audience didn't get a kick out of that!

"Any-buddy else?" I keep singing out, attending strictly to business. "Who else wants a bottle of the world's greatest flookermzyer? Only a few bottles left, good people! Any-buddy else?"

Wham!

I turn around at the crash and note that Sideburns has discovered a few bottles of Balmilino that I had left in the wings, and has aimed one dose at Ballyhoo. However, Mr. Burns must have ducked; the bottle smashed against the piano, spraying the professor with the contents. The piano-pounder spent a moment in removing the ointment from his person, then leaped over the footlights and heads for Sideburns.

"Think yuh're funny!" he snorts. "Waal, see what yuh think of this!"

He taps Roscoe a nice smack to the chin, and the manager takes a six-count. Applause from the audience, especially a neatly dressed lad in the left-side box. This feller laughs so hard that I thought he'd fall out on his ear.

"I didn't mean tuh touch yuh, Amiel!" whinnies Sideburns. "I was aimin' to kill this hombre here!"

"Sic 'em, Amiel!" pleads Ballyhoo. "He tried to kill you with that bottle!"

"Yore a li-ah!" yelps Sideburns. "Don't buh-lieve-'im, Amiel; don't buh-lieve tha faker!"

Bam!

Amiel started a roundhouse swing from the floor, and when it landed it was in the vicinity of Sideburns's left whisker. Roscoe goes down and fumes

all over the place. Great applause from the audience, and the lad in the left box almost takes a fit.

"Any-buddy else?" I keeps belling down the aisles. "One dollah per bottle. Chance of a lifetime to get the World's Greatest Remedy!"

By now I have a pocket full of coin, big silver cart wheels, and all the time I'm working steadily near the door.

"Get muh gun, Orlando!" rages Sideburns. "What ails yuh, Amiel? Can't yuh understand?"

"You ought to of heard what he told me about you, Amiel," puts in Ballyhoo. "S'terrible!"

"Yeah," sizzles Amiel, "I know that hombre. He's been tryin' tuh reduce muh salary ever since I been banging that pianner down thar. I'll larn him to fool with mew-zish-uns!"

Sideburns attempts to regain his feet. Amiel grabs the small rug that Sideburns was on, and down goes the manager in a appetizing heap. Orlando makes a third attempt to lasso Burns, but nets Amiel's right arm instead. This annoys Amiel and he goes after Orlando, Orlando goes after Ballyhoo, and Burns, seeing the time was ripe for a get-away, leaps across the footlights and races down the aisle to me.

"Step on it!" he pants. "Hold the dough and follow me!"

AMID thunderous applause from the audience, I follow Burns out of the theater and race down the main stem till we reach the hotel. A few steps from the hotel my pockets give out and half the cart wheels crash to the ground. I stop to pick 'em up.

"Let 'em alone!" shouts Burns. "Our necks is more important!"

We reach the room and lock the door behind us.

"Woof!" pants Ballyhoo, and flops on the bed.

"Not so bad," I says. "I still got twenty-five of them dollars in my poke."

Comes a sudden rap upon the door.

I look at Burns and he looks at me. Then we both look toward the window. Before we get a chance to beat it through the window, the door snaps open and I recognize the lad who was laughing so heartily in the left side box.

"Phew!" he begins, out of breath. "Pardon the forced entrance, but I was afraid I'd miss you fellows!"

"What's it all about?" demands Burns with his usual calmness.

"I caught your act just now at the opera house," says the newcomer, "and, believe me, boys, it was a riot. Yes, sir; panic! Funniest thing in vaudeville. Absolutely! Just happened

to be passing through Carsonburg, and had to wait for train to Frisco. Glad I did!

"Say, what are you guys doing out here in the sticks with an act like yours?"

"Oh, just trying it out," says Ballyhoo.

"Well, you're headed for the East, where you belong. Yes, sir; you lads are positively hot!"

"Who did you say you was?" asks Burns.

"Oh, I forgot to introduce myself. Pardon! I'm Nick Andrews, of the McNeil and Andrews Circuit. Coast-to-coast houses, you know. Nothing bigger, nothing better. Now, I can start you fellers off at five hundred a week for your act, 'The World's Greatest Remedy.' Sold?"

"Why not?" says Ballyhoo, sticking out a hand.

THE END.



Free Radiograms

FEW people realize that we have in this country an organized communication system over which messages to any part of the world may be sent absolutely free of charge. This system is known as the American Radio Relay League, Inc., and is composed of about 18,000 amateurs, government-licensed radio operators who maintain stations that are sufficiently powerful to enable them to converse with similarly licensed stations in almost any civilized nation. This is accomplished by the use of the very short frequencies, usually the twenty-meter band for extreme distance, which the United States Government has opened for the use of this amateur system.

These amateurs handle an amazing number of messages every month and it is surprising to note the speed and accuracy with which they are delivered. It is the aim of most of these stations to surpass their fellow operators in the number of messages handled for the month, and so all messages are accepted with thanks and are given more consideration than they would get from the large commercial companies in many instances. Locate the nearest amateur radio operator and watch his enthusiasm when you mention message handling.

Harold J. Sullivan.



"You take the little one and
I'll grab the big one"

War Above the Timber Line

It was open war between Clem Saddler's Texas punchers and the horde of cow thieves over in the Indian country—and Clem's few men were facing an army

By J. E. GRINSTEAD

Author of "Signed 'Scada,'" "The Saga of Silver Bend," etc.

LEADING UP TO THIS INSTALLMENT

ON the Texas side of the Red River, in the days when Oklahoma was still the Indian country and the home of outlaws and rustlers, old Wash Baines and his wife Nora had the Bar 6 Ranch. Just across the ford, the Folder brothers ran the Bar 600 brand—and received whatever stolen cattle could be run through.

Wash Baines, backed up by his hard-fighting top hand, Clem Saddler, re-

fused to let stolen cattle be run across his ford; and the Folders determined to "ride" the Bar 6. Their gang on the Texas side attacked the ranch, and were beaten off; but Wash was seriously wounded.

Clem, left in command, defended 'Aunt Nora and her niece Ellie from an attack by the Folder gang, getting many of them. But only fifteen Bar 6 men were left; and loyal Ed Royles,

This story began in the *Argosy* for October 5.

the saloon keeper, smuggled word to them that Henry Folder was importing dozens of killers to wipe out the Bar 6, men and women alike. Clem, Howdy, old John Hoard, and the others mounted guard on the ranch.

CHAPTER XI.

NIGHT WATCH.

THE guard was set, and the other men went to bed. Clem and old John stood under the stars. There was a long silence, and then Clem said:

"John, I'm too young to be telling you what to do. If you see me making a mistake, tell me. My only wish is to save Uncle Wash and the women."

"If you make a mistake, Clem, I'll be makin' it, too, for I aim to follow you as long as I can stand and shoot."

"All right. If the Folders make a night attack, they'll make it on foot from the upper side of the house. Howdy and I will be up there. You handle the other boys. If anything starts, Howdy and I will give back to the house. The point is, they mustn't touch that house as long as any of us are alive. Fight from the outside until they crowd you, then go inside, and I'll join you," and with Howdy, Clem swung away toward the rising ground above.

"He has courage like a bear," mused old John. "He's got inside dope on this fight somewhere, but he ain't telling it."

Thus began a long, lonesome night. Clem and Howdy took position on high ground a little way above the house. They divided the time, one sleeping while the other watched. Clem took the first watch. Far to the west he could see a low cloud bank barely above

the horizon. From time to time it was fretted and crisscrossed with lightning flashes. Otherwise, the sky was clear.

He hoped they would make the attack that night, if they were going to attack the house at all. The strain on his men was bound to tell when the fight came. If they watched two nights, they would be worn out.

Nothing happened. He grew sleepy and woke Howdy. Then stretching on the ground, he was asleep in a moment. Some time after midnight, Howdy woke him and reported that there had not been a sound. Then Howdy went to sleep. Clem walked around for half an hour, to get awake. He stopped in the dense shadow of a stunted cedar, near where Howdy lay.

He had been standing still for several minutes, listening, when he heard a stealthy step. Peering through the cedar, he saw two men, standing in a listening attitude. Presently they squatted down within thirty feet of him, and one of them spoke in a guarded tone.

"Dead to the world. I told Henry to-night was the time to pull it. Told him they'd be out watching them beef steers after the drive last night, and all that."

"Shore would have been the time," replied the other.

"Of course, it would. We could have cleaned the ranch, and to hell with the punchers. They'd leave. If I had five or six men instead of just you—"

"Ain't no use talkin' about that. We ain't got 'em."

"No, we ain't. Henry's too damn smart. Said when these Bar 6 men has lost a coupla nights' sleep, watchin' the steers, they couldn't see to shoot in the daytime, then we'd take 'em on."

"Henry's boss. He told us to look

the layout over and we done it. I ain't crazy about stayin' here."

UP from the corral came the snort of a horse and two or three jumps as the animal tried to pitch. The guard was changing.

"What was that?" asked one of the men.

"Braunk pitchin'. Somebody's going to ride. We better get back to that little ellum where we left our mounts," and they rose and crept away.

Clem sprang to where Howdy lay, touched him, and he was awake.

"Follow me," whispered Clem.

He knew where the little elm was, and knew that two trails, with a ridge between them, led to it. The two snoopers would walk slowly, carefully. Sprinting along on his toes, with Howdy at his heels, Clem gained the little elm and the two horses ahead of their owners.

"No shooting," said Clem, as they stopped in the dark shadow of the elm. "You take the little one, and I'll take the tall one. Wait until they get close, then hit quick and hard."

The men came on. Clem and Howdy crouched against the bole of the tree, between the men and their horses. The two snoopers were within three feet of them when they sprang and struck with their heavy guns. The snoopers were down and out.

Half an hour later they came to and sat up. They found that they had been disarmed, and their hands and feet tied with their own hornstrings.

"What the hell does this mean?" snarled the tall man.

"Means," Clem said, "that you've got a sore head. Also means that you can't spy on the Bar 6 and get away with it. Besides that, it means this tree is not very tall, but it's tall enough."

"Tall enough for what?"

"To hang two men who wished they had enough help to burn a house and kill two women and a wounded man, while nobody was looking."

"We were just doing what Henry Folder told us to do."

"Oh, cut it out," broke in the other fellow. "We got caught with the goods. Who cares for being hung? We won't beat 'em to hell very much, anyway. Henry Folder aims to tend to the Bar 6."

"When?" asked Clem, hoping to catch the fellow off his guard.

"Ask him!" laughed the rogue. "He'll tell you."

"I'll tell you if you'll let us go," said the tall one, who had spoken first.

"Never mind. A man who would associate with Henry Folder, and do what you have done to-night, would lie, no matter where he was."

"You'll smoke in hell for this, as soon as Henry—"

"Shut up! Swing that noose over here, Howdy. That's it. Get the other one."

CHAPTER XII.

WARNING.

CLEM and Howdy went back to their post. Neither of them slept any more. Just before daylight, Clem looked at that cloud bank in the west. It was apparently no higher than it had been earlier in the night.

Clem looked the men over at breakfast. They were apparently none the worse for having lost part of a night's sleep. They had ridden night-herd often. Clem had learned only one thing from the two snoopers, whom he and Howdy had not mentioned. That was, that Henry Folder meant to make his

attack in the daytime, and to win by sheer force of numbers, while the Bar 6 men couldn't shoot for want of sleep.

He had the satisfaction of knowing that Folder would get no report from his two night prowlers, unless he could read a message in the empty saddles of their horses if they went back home.

Breakfast over, the men went out to saddle fresh mounts. Clem heard a horse come clattering along the trail from town. It was barely eight o'clock, but Dr. Bowden was coming out and riding at a brisk gait. Clem hadn't yet been to the house. Instead of riding to the yard gate, the doctor rode on to the corral, stopped a little way before he reached the men, and called Clem. Bowden had dismounted, and as Clem came up he stepped close to him, and said:

"I've got something for you. The gentleman said not to let anybody see me give it to you," and with a quick motion he slipped a folded envelope into Clem's shirt pocket. "Come on up to the house after a bit. If there's any answer, I'll take it."

Clem walked to the bunk shack and entered. There was no one else there. He tore open the envelope, took out a soiled sheet of paper, and read:

What I told you about hapens today.
Atween dinner time and nite, comin'
from crost the river. Big gang. Means
biznes. Wish you wood let me send
Pop Shyrs amberlanch for Wash and
wimmen. If you will, let me no by
Doc. This is all I can do. Its to late.
Good Luck. Ed.

The writing was terrible, but Clem puzzled it out after awhile. Ed Royles's education may have been neglected, undoubtedly had been, but his heart was in the right place, and he wasn't a quitter. Clem struck a match, set fire to the note and envelope, watched them

burn to ashes on the hearth, then set his foot on the ashes.

Henry Folder and his killers might sack the Bar 6, but they should find no evidence of Ed Royles's loyalty to Wash Baines and his men. Clem couldn't accept the offer, but he loved Ed for making it. Out at the corral again, Clem said:

"If any of you boys think you could sleep until noon, go pile into a bunk and get at it." Then he motioned old John aside. "John, it's going to happen to-day, but I don't want the boys to know it now. Just before noon have the remuda brought in. Tell each one of the boys to rope out his best mount. Not the prettiest one, but the one that can go longest without grass."

"What's the idea?"

"I don't mean for that mess to happen here at the Bar 6. It's too dangerous. We'll take them on in the open."

CLEM walked off toward the house. Old John stood a moment looking at the swing of Clem's lithe body, shook his head, and went about his job.

Dr. Bowden was looking Baines over when Clem went in. And Nora was in the room, but Ellie was not in sight. Clem wondered if she was still asleep. She was not. She had seen Clem coming and slipped into the kitchen.

"Getting along fine," said Bowden, "but you've got to quit worrying. You've sold your steers now, and they're gone. There's nothing to worry about. All you have to do is keep quiet a few days, and you'll get well and sound. The bullet went clean through and on about its business. Both wounds are open on the outside. I've kept 'em open. Healing has started from the inside. The wounds are about

dry. I've removed the gauze and they'll begin to heal pretty soon. Nothing to worry about now. I'm going—" Bowden caught Clem's eye, Clem shook his head, and Bowden finished—"out with Clem to have a smoke and a little visit. Be in again after awhile."

"That's all right, Doc," said Baines. "I feel a lot better, but I want to talk to Clem a minute. Clem, the beef steers are gone, but they's plenty fat cows and three-year-olds. You better take the boys and ride the range some. I'll be all right now. Nora and Ellie can take care of me."

"All right, Uncle Wash. We'll ride right after noon. Just wanted to see that you were all set and comfortable. We may not get in until pretty late," and Clem left the room. He didn't want Wash Baines to see the trouble that he knew must show in his face.

The doctor followed him, and when they were well away from the house, Clem said:

"Doctor, have you any patients that are likely to die if you don't see them for awhile?"

"Hell, no! Some of 'em are likely to get well on me, and lose me some money," chuckled Dr. Bowden.

"Well, you can keep account of what you lose, and I'll make it good. I want you to stay here all day, and maybe all night. You may have to chloroform Uncle Wash again."

"What!"

"The Folder gang is going to ride the Bar 6 again this afternoon."

"Why, I thought you said you and the boys aimed to ride, right after noon."

"We do, but not after cattle. I don't want another mess like that last one, here at the house. Every time I close my eyes I still see Ellie, with blood all over her face and hands."

"She weren't right pretty then, was she?" laughed the doctor. "Now see here, Clem. Ed Royles told me he was trying to get you to bring Wash and the women to town, and it looks like good sense to me."

"It would be, if Wash Baines would go, but I know him, and I know he won't go. Not only that, he'll go crazy and reach for his gun if anybody mentions it to him. That would throw him into fever, and undo all you have done for him."

"Yes, it would," said Bowden, thoughtfully.

ALL I can do is to take the boys and try to meet that gang in the open, as far from the house as possible. I want you to stick around, and as soon as Uncle Wash has had his dinner, put him to sleep, good. Then he won't know how long you stay. Some of our boys are likely to come in, shot to shoestrings and they'll need you. If you'd stay and do that, it would take some of the load off me, and I've got plenty."

"I'll do it, Clem. There's another doctor in town, and he can take care of emergency cases."

"Thank you, doctor. Now, there is another thing. How is Ellie this morning?"

"How is she? Have you seen her?"

"No, I haven't seen her since she came back from that ride yesterday, and she didn't look very well then."

"Well, you ought to see her. She's the prettiest thing on the Bar 6, not excepting your Sunday horse. You'd never know she had been through the mill. That wound healed by first intention, and it's not even red this morning."

"I've got to see her, and she won't talk to me at the house."

"Hum! Come to think of it, she does need a little fresh air and exercise."

By the doctor's maneuvering, Clem and Ellie rode away from the ranch a few minutes later. Clem's face was hard and set. Ellie's cheeks were pink, and her brown eyes fairly sparkled with the very joy of living. She wasn't dumb. She knew that Clem had engineered this ride, and that he had something to tell her. They rode in silence until they were half a mile west of the house, and then Clem pulled up and said:

"Let's stop a minute. I can't talk to do any good, going along, and I've got to tell you something."

Ellie drew in her horse and looked at him. There was no love light in his eyes. In a flash something came to her mind:

"Clem, I slept all day yesterday, and last night I sat up most of the night with Uncle Wash. Several times I heard men riding about the place. What were they doing?"

"Ellie, if I didn't know you to be the gamest woman I ever saw, I wouldn't tell you this. I hate to do it, but I must. That was our boys, changing shifts of the watch. They watched the ranch all night."

"Watched it! What for?"

"Because it wasn't safe not to watch it. That Folder gang is going to try to ride us again to-day, and I can't afford to let them come to the house again, like they did the last time. I'll never get over seeing you all covered with blood, and it was only God's mercy that the bullet struck the glass, instead of your heart. When men get to where they'll fire on a house with women in it they'll do anything, and are not fit to live. You may think—"

"Don't, Clem!" and Ellie's lips

trembled. "I—I understand a lot of things, now."

"**M**AYBE you do, but you don't. You can't understand Henry Folder and his gang of murderers. I know they are coming this afternoon. They have sworn to take the Bar 6 apart and destroy it. I'm going to do all I can to keep them from reaching it. I don't care for myself. If they get me, they get me, and that's all. There never can be much in life for me. I started wrong. I'm a killer, and—"

Ellie winced, and tried to speak, but the words failed to come.

"Nobody will miss me. It's Uncle Wash, Aunt Nora and you that I'm worried about. I'd try to get Uncle Wash to let the doctor take you all to town, but I know he wouldn't go, and—"

"Of course he wouldn't!" Ellie said. "I don't blame him. The ranch is his. Aunt Nora told me all about it. I wouldn't go either!"

"Well, if you wouldn't go, that settles it. I know you love Uncle Wash, and would do anything for him. Right after noon we'll ride. There will be no man on the place except Dr. Bowden. He has promised to stay all day, and all night if necessary. Some of our boys may come in hurt and need him. The Folder gang will never get to the house as long as any of us are alive. Now, can you go back to the house, keep your courage, tell no one what I have told you, and do all you can to help us win this fight and save Uncle Wash?"

"Yes, but Clem, I—you—" She stopped, and two big tears squeezed from her eyes as she tried to hold them back.

"Don't, Ellie! Please don't!"

She wiped away the tears and tried to smile as Clem went on:

"There's just one more thing I want to say. You told me you wanted us to be friendly on Uncle Wash's account. I want us to be friendly on his account, and on our own account, too. No man ever needed a friend more than I do right now. Won't—"

"Clem," she said, looking up at him through swimmy eyes, "can't you ever forgive me for what I said about you being a pet killer? I didn't understand then."

"Oh, I don't blame you for it."

"That isn't enough. I want you to forgive me, and forget that I ever said that."

"Yes, I forgive you," said Clem slowly; "if there is anything to forgive. There are a lot of things I'd like to say to you, Ellie. I'd like to try to explain to you why my life has been like it has been, but—there is no time to tell you, now, and I may never have another chance. It would help in the show-down, to know that you and I are friendly on our own account, as well as on account of Uncle Wash."

"We are," said Ellie, her face flushing and then going white as she went on; "but Clem! There are only fifteen of you boys left. I counted you yesterday. There may be a hundred of those outlaws."

"I know that, Ellie. We can only do our best."

"But, it—it isn't fair!"

"Everything is fair in war. Let's get back to the house."

Clem knew that if Ellie shed another tear he was going to have her in his arms, in spite of all the will he had. At the yard gate they dismounted.

"Good-by," said Clem, gravely extending his hand. She clasped it and cried:

"No, no! Not good-by!"

"All right, then. *Adios* until I see you again," and swinging to his saddle, Clem rode away toward the corral, while Ellie went on into the house alone.

AT the bunk house, old John and Howdy were out in the shade, where they couldn't be seen from the house. They had cleaned and oiled all the rifles, and stood them against the side of the shack. At the butt of each gun was a little pile of cartridges.

"All set," growled John. "There's every dang cartridge we got. Divided them even, and give the odd one to you for luck. Better wake the boys, now, and let 'em get saddled before noon."

"That's right, John. Rope out that broom-tailed bay for me. I'm going to sleep until dinner is ready."

When the men were all out, Clem fell down on a bunk, but he didn't sleep. A thousand thoughts were in his mind, but the uppermost, the most persistent one was of Ellie Baines. If he came back. *If* he came back? What chance was there? One in a thousand, perhaps. Folder's men would be instructed to get him first. Oh, well, the others would carry on under old John when he was gone.

Immediately after noon they rode from the ranch. Ellie was watching them from the kitchen window. She felt a hurt that she had never known before. She recalled Aunt Nora's words: "The bravest little woman that ever watched for her man to return from a round-up or a gun fight."

She was watching her man go to a gun fight. Would he return? She brushed away the tears that just would well in her eyes, and with a calm face went into the sick room. Wash Baines

was sleeping soundly. She didn't know that he would lie like that for many hours. Dr. Bowden was calmly taking a nap on the day bed, and Aunt Nora was in Ellie's room sound asleep. Ellie was turning away on tiptoe when the doctor opened one eye, then the other, and motioned her over to him.

"Now, young lady, I know what Clem told you. It's up to you and me to hold the fort. It won't do any good to worry. Go lie down somewhere and go to sleep for a while," and he composed himself to finish his nap.

"Go to sleep!" mused Ellie as she walked softly from the room. "What does he know about being worried? He sees people die every day, but they don't mean anything to him!" and she crept back to that kitchen window, and stared off toward the river, where Clem and his men were just disappearing over the slope that led down to the stream slightly above the twin cottonwoods.

CHAPTER XIII.

PITCHED BATTLE.

CLEM and his riders turned east along the river bank, with a thicket of willows and seedling cottonwoods between them and the stream.

"Here's where we dismount," said Clem, just before they reached the big cottonwood. "We'll hide our horses in this thicket."

"Now what?" asked John Hoard when the horses were hidden.

"We'll keep in the thicket until we strike that big wash that comes in just above the cottonwood. Then we'll follow up the wash until we are in fifty feet of the trail. After that, all we can do is wait."

"Why, Clem! That's plain bush-whacking!"

"I know it; but it is our only chance to save the Bar 6. We can't fight an army in the open. Men that fire on women haven't got anything coming to them."

"That shore is so! All right, let's go."

The sun poured down into that wash with telling force, and there was no shade. The sun was bright overhead, but the west was hazy. An hour passed, and not a sound was heard. Then came the splashing of water in the ford. Old John, who had been peeping over the bank, slipped down to Clem's side.

"Forty of 'em crossing in a bunch."

"Caution the boys. Don't miss the first shot. Give 'em something to think about. We don't want any of them to get by and go on to the ranch."

The enemy rode confidently up the river bank, spread out as wide as they could in the cut that led down to the ford. Twenty of them were near the top of the cut, and the rest just coming out of the water, when a storm of bullets swept them.

There was no missing done in that first volley, and another followed it like an echo. Men and horses went down in a cursing, kicking, struggling mass. Those who could, turned and sought to escape back through that cut, which was swept by a hail of lead. The survivors broke pell-mell back through the ford, with bullets splashing the water all about them.

"Henry Folder wasn't with 'em, damn him!" snapped old John. "I looked good."

Clem started as if he had been stung.

"My God, boys! That was just a gang to draw us away from the house, while Henry and the main gang come

in from the other side. To your horses, quick!"

Ellie had heard the firing, and her heart gave a great bound as she counted fifteen riders tearing along the old cattle trail, and recognized Clem and Howdy in the lead. On they rode, swinging out of the trail, passing a few hundred yards above the house, and disappearing in the broken hilly country at the foot of the headland.

HENRY FOLDER and his gang of murderers and house burners, picked especially for that job, would have carried out their purpose, but for the two dead men who swung in a little elm tree, with feet barely off the ground. The mystery of the two riderless horses of his spies, that had come in that morning, was solved, but Henry had to stop and curse a while, and tell his men what he would do to the Bar 6 outfit. Then, with a terrible oath, he drove in his spurs.

"They'll pay, damn 'em!" he roared.

But that little halt had interfered with his collections. From the top of a little hill, which was inaccessible from Folder's side, came a withering volley of rifle shots. The attackers had no shelter. Men were dropping all about, and panic seized them. They managed to turn, and those who could ride escaped around the foot of a hill.

Henry Folder seemed to bear a charmed life. In spite of the hail of lead about him, he had not been touched. Back in the hills, where he and his band had been hiding until the hour came, they had heard nothing of the firing at the river. Now he tore across the rough ground, with the remnant of his band, to join the decoy gang that was to come across the river and that he had no idea had been practically destroyed.

"Back to the ranch!" called Clem as he and his men mounted.

Back across the foot of the hill they raced, and came out on the level valley a quarter mile east of the Bar 6. Again Ellie saw them, again she counted them, and with a pæan of praise in her heart saw that there were still fifteen in that brave little band.

Henry Folder came around the point of the headland, saw them, and stopped. Where was his decoy party? He had only ten men left who were able to fight. Six badly wounded but still able to ride, were thundering on down the old cattle trail toward the crossing.

Mr. Folder was a hard, ruthless fighter, but he had no desire to give that little band of Bar 6 lead-slingers odds in battle. There had been a hitch somewhere. He had forty men that hadn't come up. He'd go on to the river and join them.

To think was to act, with Henry Folder. Like a flash of powder the ten whirled and headed for the crossing. Aflame with rage at Folder's trick, which had so nearly succeeded, and drunk with two victories in which not one of his men had been touched, Clem was wild to get Henry Folder.

"Come on, boys!" he called. "We'll get Henry and finish this mess!"

Folder saw the situation and sank his rowels home. His men did likewise, and away they went with every ounce of speed their horses had in them. They had a lead of two hundred yards by the time Clem and his men struck the old trail, and they kept it. Plunging over and around dead men and horses in the cut, they gained the ford and splashed into it. By the time they reached the bar on the other side, bullets were whining among them, but they spurred on into the willows.

"Come on, fellows!" called Clem, as he splashed into the ford. "We'll clean that gang up this time."

On they rode, across the stream, through half a mile of sand dunes and willows, seeing no one. They came out in the open, and there in the flat, where he had caught the rustlers branding Bar 6 steers, Clem sighted his prey. Folder and his men had joined the remnant of the forty who had first met defeat. He now had twenty-five men.

Clem halted his men.

"Can we take them, boys?" he asked.

"Of course we can take 'em! Let's go before they get away again."

THE late afternoon was drawing on by this time. No one had noticed the weather. The sun, far over to the west, was a red ball, showing through a thick haze. They charged across the flat, opened fire from a long range, and Folder gave back. Began then a game of tag, which lasted for an hour. Clem was wondering why Folder didn't either stand and fight, or else run for it, when old John loped to his side.

"Look!" he said, pointing to two bands of riders coming over the ridge, one a little way to the east of Folder's detachment and the other to the west of it. Henry Folder's tactics were plain enough now. He had been waiting for reinforcements, and they had come. Clem and his men were now half a mile above the trail, and one of the bands was following the trail straight for the river.

"They aim to cut us off from our clabber!" yelled Hoard. "Quick! Make for the big cottonwood, straight through the willows."

The tide of battle had turned, and

for the first time the little Bar 6 band was on the run. Clem planned to cross the river and make his stand in the gully, where they had the first fight of the afternoon.

As they reached the bar at the edge of the willows, meaning to turn downstream to the ford, thirty men poured out of the willows where the trail came down, and a volley of shots pelted among the Bar 6 men. They whirled back in among the willow-covered dunes, but two of their men lay dead on the bar. Besides that, Banty Taylor, the one who had told the yarn about Pap and the hawk, had a bullet in his leg and a broken arm.

"Steady, now," commanded old John. "They ain't got us yet. They're too smart to try to rush us in here. Get the horses down in that sink. That's the idea. Now we got dunes all around us. Crawl up on the dunes, crouch in the willows, and when a bush shakes, shoot."

Henry Folder was no mean general. His little army of thugs were in three detachments. One held the ford on his left, one covered the river above the enemy, while he and his main army held the center immediately north of the Bar 6 position. Clem couldn't lead his men toward the river without encountering a cross fire from the two guard detachments. He couldn't attack the center for a number of reasons.

Folder knew his terrain thoroughly. The giant cottonwood, with its deep roots, had withstood a thousand floods, caught drift, and made what amounted to an island about it. Often the river had gone far beyond it, but the old tree and its cluster of dunes and willows, with a deep sink in the midst of them, where the Bar 6 men's horses now stood, had held their own against the floods.

From the river sand to the north side of this island was not quite a hundred feet. At some time the river had broken around the tree and its island, and swept a channel through the willows to the north of Clem's haven, which he had won by sheer chance, and which was less than two hundred feet long.

This left an open strip of clean river sand about seventy feet wide, north of Clem's position, that ran entirely around his island. He soon saw the situation. Part of his men climbed to the top of the dunes on the north, and scraping out burrows, lay peering through to that open strip.

But Henry Folder was far too wise, in the light of past experience with those gunners, to try an attack across that open ground. There was no ground from which he could see into the Bar 6 position, and the defenders commanded the only tree on that side of the river. He was still revolving a plan of attack in his mind, when night flapped down suddenly, like the alighting of a great, black bird.

BANTY TAYLOR lay on a smooth bit of sand at the foot of a dune.

They had no water for him, but he didn't murmur. As darkness fell, Clem and old John drew toward the river side of their stronghold in the dunes and conversed in low tones. Clem was broken-hearted.

"It's all my fault, John," he said. "I couldn't let well enough alone."

"No fault about it," growled John. "Our luck just played out. They've got us where they can ride us, but you ain't to blame for it. They're makin' a big fire down at the crossing, so if we make a break for the ford, they can pot us by the light of it. We couldn't cross that quicksand above here if we

tried, and there's another gang up there. We're surrounded and got to take our medicine. If we have to go, some of them goes with us, when they come to take us."

"We've got 'em trapped, fellows!" called the voice of Henry Folder from the edge of the willows north of the open strip. "Don't crowd 'em. Just loose-herd 'em until morning, then we'll have a hangin' here and a party at the Bar 6."

At mention of the Bar 6, Clem went cold. Folder held the crossing. What was to prevent him from crossing men to the other side and having the Bar 6 at his mercy? Why didn't the brute at least send men across to get his dead and wounded in the cut and out of the little elm?

Then the reason flashed to Clem's mind. While that fire made a fine shooting light for Folder's men, it also made a fine shooting light for those lead-slingers of his own. With his enemy trapped, Henry Folder was willing to let well enough alone. The Bar 6 and its occupants would still be there in the morning.

"I'm going to get Banty some water," said Clem. "He hasn't said a word, but I guess he's about dead for a drink. I know I am."

"You're going to get shot to rags if you try to go to that river."

"Maybe so. I'd as soon be shot out there as in here. Daylight tells it for us anyway."

A few minutes later, with four saddle canteens stowed about him, Clem began crawling obliquely across the bar. A fine drizzle of rain had set in, and the fire at the ford was not so bright. Clem was watching it. He reached the river, drank his fill, and then filled the canteens. Strapping them about his body, he started to

crawl back. He hadn't gone a dozen feet, when a voice fifty yards up the bar said:

"What the hell was that?"

"Hog, I reckon," replied another.

"Hog, hell! There never was a hog above the timber line. Them fellows are trying to cross."

A shot crashed and the bullet thudded in the sand, just behind Clem.

"Stop that, you damn fool! Don't you know they's twenty foot of water for half a mile above the ford?"

"Yes, I know it, but they can swim, can't they?"

"Yes, and we'll hear 'em if they do. Time enough to shoot then. We ain't got any ammunition to waste and you know it."

CLEM gained complete darkness and crept slowly in. At the edge of the willows he stopped to rest a moment. He had a double purpose in crawling to that river. One was to get water for Banty, and the other was to see if his men could get there and swim across. The thought of the ranch being unprotected and them trapped there, was driving him mad. He had discovered that they'd never be able to make it. The stream was watched too closely.

"That you, Clem?" called a low voice near him.

"Yes."

"Well, come on in here! I thought they got you, shore." John Hoard led the way to where Banty lay on the ground.

"Take these other three and split the water with the other boys, John," whispered Clem, as he put one of the canteens in Banty's hands. "Banty gets all this one."

Silence was over the wet, uncomfortable little band, as they lay in their

soggy breastworks, waiting for the end. After awhile, Henry Folder's harsh voice broke the stillness again.

"Hey, you, Clem Saddler! If you want to fight in the open so damn bad, why'n't you come out and try it?"

Clem made no reply. He was sitting on the ground by the side of Banty, berating himself for the position he had got these brave fellows into, and wondering what was happening at the Bar 6.

"Sulking on us, eh?" sneered Folder. "Won't even tell us what you aim to do to us."

"Maybe they've sneaked out and crossed the river," said another voice.

"Hell they have! A water moccasin couldn't cross that river, the way the boys are watching it. They're in there, all right, all the same as chickens in a coop, waiting for their necks to be wrung."

"Then let's shell hell out of 'em!"

"Shut up, fool! We've got no cartridges to waste," said Folder, lowering his voice.

"Well, we'll have plenty when Dave gets back. He's gone to the ranch after—"

"If you don't shut up, I'll wring yo' damned neck!" and silence followed.

Old John crawled to where Clem sat.

"Did you hear that, Clem?"

"Yes. I've heard it once before," and he told what the guard at the river had said.

"They ain't no worse off than we are," John went on. "The boys average three cartridges apiece. That's going to make the last fight pretty short. It wouldn't do us any good to get to the ranch. I divided up all we had and issued 'em to the boys before we started."

"No chance," said Clem, hopelessly.

"If there was a carload there, we couldn't get 'em."

SILENCE fell again. The hours dragged on. It was almost daylight and gray was showing in the fog. Banty told Clem to call old John, he wanted to talk to them. When John came, the little puncher, who in spite of his five feet three was as game as the biggest man in the world, said:

"Fellers, I know where some cartridges is."

"Where?" they asked in concert.

"In a salt sack under old man Wash's bed."

"Clem got them the morning of that first fight," said John Hoard.

"No, I didn't," said Clem. "I got about half of them. There's four or five hundred left in that sack. I got some with the guns. Some more came out in the ambulance, and I forgot all about those at the house. But what good does that do us?"

"I'll go get 'em," said Banty.

"No!" chorused Clem and John.

"Now, listen, fellers," pleaded Banty. "I'm done for. My arm's broke and my leg's shot all to rags, but I can ride. It ain't long until them fellers is comin' in here. I can't fight. They won't even shoot me. They'll just bust me over the head with a club like I was a crippled dog. Put me on my horse, fellers, and let me try for it. If I could get them cartridges back here in time to win this fight, I'd die easy. Even if they get me when I try, I feel like I'll go straight to heaven before my heels get cold. Please. Put me on my braunk, and let me feel like I'm some account one more time before I go."

Five minutes later, Banty eased his mount out of the willows and walked it slowly through the dense fog toward the ford.

"I've only got five cartridges," whispered Clem, as he stepped to the edge of the willows, carbine in hand. "If they fire on Banty, here they go. I'll—"

Water splashed, as Banty struck the ford. Clem's gun was at his shoulder, pointing in the general direction of Folder's lower guard. A gun cracked, showing an orange spot in the fog. Clem's gun swung a fraction and fired. He stepped quickly aside. Another gun flared through the fog and he fired again.

The horse was splashing far toward the other side now, and presently hoof-beats sounded on the bar at the south side, out of possible range.

"Thank God!" murmured Clem. "He made it. But he'll never get back. They'll watch and blow him to scraps if he tries it. But he got away. He won't be murdered like a dog. He'll tell Dr. Bowden and he can at least save the women."

"What the hell's goin' on down here!" roared Henry Folder, as he approached the river guard.

"One of 'em got away and crossed over."

"Why didn't you get him? Was you asleep?"

"No, I wasn't asleep. Can you see a horse fifty foot in the fog? No. That ain't all. Them fellows in the willows covered his retreat some. There lays two of our men, shot as square through the neck as you could put your finger. Them fellows can shoot in the dark."

"Never mind that. Push in closer to that crossing and watch. If you can't see, you can hear. It'll be light enough to go in and get 'em directly."

"We could all made that ride, Clem," said old John.

"Not a chance. That many riders would make a target a woman could

hit with an empty bottle. I got two. I've got three cartridges left. I mean to get the first three I see, and then—"

"Banty may come back. God didn't make but one like him."

"He might. Listen, John; who's the two best shots in the outfit?"

"You and Howdy, gun or pistol."

"We have about forty cartridges among us. Give Howdy and me a full magazine apiece, and when Banty starts back across that ford, we'll keep the dogs off him or die trying. If he don't come before the showdown, we'll give 'em back to you."

CHAPTER XIV.

THE GATE IS CLOSED.

THAT night at the Bar 6 had been a night of terror, especially for Ellie Baines. Not once did she close her eyes, in spite of the scolding and protestations of Dr. Bowden and Aunt Nora. From room to room of the old ranch house she walked, and out onto the long gallery, her face white and set and her hands clenched. She had seen fifteen Bar 6 men ride away after the Folder gang, and she had exulted in their great courage.

At nightfall she had heard shots at the river crossing. Now she had heard them again as the morning began to turn to gray. She stood on the old gallery in the wet fog and mist, and suddenly she heard two things. One was a low, rumbling roar. The other was the patter of hoofs, coming from toward the river. A horse skidded to a stop at the gate and a voice called:

"Oh, doc! Dr. Bowden."

"Only some one sick and wants a doctor," she thought. She stepped to the door and called him.

Bowden ran out to the gate.

"It's—it's me, doc. Banty. I—I'm shot all to rags. Do—do something for me if you can."

Bowden was a giant of a man. He took the bloody form in his arms and carrying it to the house, laid it on the gallery, just as Ellie ran to where they were.

"Let—let me tell you first, doc. Clem and the boys are cornered on yan' side the river and out of cartridges. I was already shot some, so I offered to come get them cartridges. In the bag under Mr. Baines's bed. But—but I can't make it, doc. They—they hit me twicet more as I cross the river, and—"

"Hell! He's gone!" muttered the doctor, but he was talking to himself.

DAYLIGHT came slowly. Just within the screen of willows, Clem and Howdy stood, peering out at the dim outline of the big cottonwood that stood on the Texas bank of the river. If Banty made it back, they'd mix it with anybody who tried to stop him at the ford. Suddenly there was a swishing roar.

"In hell with the gate shut!" snapped old John Hoard and a ten-foot wall of hissing, stinking water swept down the stream, spreading almost from one cottonwood to the other.

"It's all over now," said Clem. "Give the boys back their cartridges."

"No! Wait. Look! There's Banty!"

It was getting lighter. They could see Banty's horse standing at the foot of the Texas twin cottonwood, while Banty was tugging at the rope that held the boat to the big cottonwood.

"He'll never make it," said old John, "crippled like he is. He can't run the boat with one arm. He can't get on it."

They watched spellbound. Banty

suddenly slipped and rolled down the bank, and struck the side of the boat. For a breathless moment, he was out of sight, between the boat and the bank. They could hardly suppress a yell, as they saw him crawl over the gunwale and drop to the floor of the boat.

Now he was pulling in the long line with which the boat had been made fast to the big cottonwood. Caught by the current, as it hung at an angle on the cable-pulleys, the boat shot out into the stream. All manner of things rode that wild, swift stream. Fortunately there were no logs, for there was no timber where that flood came from.

"Take the right, Howdy!" snapped Clem. "I'll take the left. If you miss a shot I'll kill you."

They stepped out of the willows together, and stood back to back in the open. A gun crashed from the bar below, and the bullet struck the side of the boat. Clem fired; and that man would never shoot again.

A man stepped into the open above them and threw a gun to his shoulder. He dropped before he could pull the trigger. Folder's men, bent on stopping the boat, which they supposed was coming after the Bar 6 men, took no note of Clem and Howdy, and every time one fired or tried to fire on that boat, he was shot down, dead or terribly wounded.

The boat came on, driven by the current against its angling sides. As it neared the bank, the long line was thrown ashore. Clem caught it and made it fast to some willows. As he turned back, the boatman sprang ashore, and beneath the brim of a battered, watersoaked old Stetson he saw the white face of Ellie Baines!

Clem caught the old salt sack from her hands and threw it in among his men. Then catching her up bodily, he

carried her to the safest spot and put her on the ground.

"Don't move," he said. "Lie down. There'll be bullets all about here in a minute."

"I—I won't move," she panted.

Ellie lay in the sheltered pit that had been scraped out for Banty, unmindful of the blood-soaked sand on which she lay. Clem spoke no further word to her. There were two reasons. One was that he was busy trying to plan a solution of his problem. The other was that he couldn't trust himself there, to talk to this slip of a girl who had risked her life to save his own.

THERE was no sound in that little fortress save the rapid click of cartridges through loading gates and into cylinders, for a minute or two. The fog was falling, which presaged that the sun would be shining soon.

"Now, John," said Clem in a low tone. "We're still in a tight place, but the situation has changed. We've got to win out of here, now," and he nodded his head to where Ellie lay.

"We shore have. She ain't got as much business in here as mustard's got in a pie. We wouldn't of had a chance if she hadn't brang them cartridges. She's got to get back to the Bar 6 safe, and I know how it can be done."

"All right. Let's hear it. They'll be on us as soon as it gets a little lighter."

"Why, it's simple enough. You take Ellie on the boat, and make her lie down agin the gunnel, while you work the boat. Them gunnels is four-inch hewed cottonwood, and they ain't a gun in this country that'll send a bullet through 'em, nor one that'll throw lead to the other side of this mess of water. I'll take the boys and keep the dogs off until you get acrost, and—"

"Never mind," snapped Clem. "It

won't work. I'm not going to split our outfit. Right here we win or lose; and we've got to win. Now, if you'll take Ellie—"

"Why, Clem, you know I couldn't do that!"

"Sure I know it, and you know I couldn't do it."

Clem knew something else that he didn't mention. He knew Ellie Baines wouldn't go back across that river without him, and the thought warmed him. He also knew that if he fled to safety with her, which was quite possible, she would despise him, as he would despise himself. He roused from his moment's reverie, and said:

"All we can do is keep close in these dunes, and shoot every time we glimpse a man."

"I reckon you're right," growled John Hoard. "I'll crawl up on the north side of this little pocket hell, and see what I can locate."

At the crest of the dune, John Hoard burrowed into the loose sand and peered through the willows and on across that open strip of sand. He could glimpse men in the edge of the willows, beyond that strip, but he was looking for a particular man. As he lay watching like a cat stalking a bird, Henry Folder's voice rose in a roar.

"Close in on 'em now, boys. It's light enough and they can't get away."

"Close in on 'em yourself," snarled one of Folder's men. "If you think them fellers are licked, you're just a plain damn fool."

Folder's roar of rage at the insubordination of his men was drowned in the crash of John Hoard's carbine. Folder went down, but Hoard's gun went on crashing until four more, all that were near the leader, were down.

There was a spasm of firing, and bullets whined over the heads of the

Bar 6 men and of Ellie Baines, as she lay in her trench.

"STOP it, you damn fools!" roared a big voice among the besiegers.

"You ain't doin' nothin' but wastin' lead. They've got Henry."

"Well, that don't make you captain," jeered another of the outlaws.

"It makes me captain of myself. The rest of you mavericks can do what you like, but I'm going from here."

"Go on! You yaller hound. They's still forty of us left. Henry brings us together to go in and get them fellers. Who's goin' in there with me?"

Whoever this new Alexander was, he seemed to be making a bad break when he apprised his enemy of his position and intended movements. He was slightly above Clem's position and in the willows beyond the opening. Obviously, he meant to attack from that direction. The Bar 6 men were scattered along the dunes east, west, and north of their position, while the surging river held the south side. Clem and old John Hoard were at the west, near the big cottonwood.

"Hadn't we better bunch the boys at this end, Clem?"

"Wait a little. They don't seem to be coming this way. There's a trick somewhere."

There had been silence for five minutes. That new general was not so foolish as he seemed. In that five minutes, he had moved his men around to the north of the willows and massed them to the east of Clem's position.

There was only one thing to prevent them from rushing into the little earthworks, and overwhelming the Bar 6 men with their numbers. That was Howdy, who lay far up on the dunes at the east, peering through the bushes. He heard a slight movement in the wil-

lows below him and like a flash he sneaked down the short slope and passed the word along.

With their new leader at their head, and confident that his ruse had worked, the outlaws, forty in number, rose as one man and started up the short slope to the top of the dune, from where they meant to pour death into that little pocket.

Guns in their hands, they crept noiselessly up the slope and were halfway to the crest when they met a sheet of fire and lead that kept coming. Half of them were down in ten seconds. The rest fled incontinently into the willows.

Scattered around the top of their natural breastworks, Clem and his men went on watching. By that time the last trace of the fog was gone, and the sun was pouring its scorching rays down into that little fortress. The horses stood huddled together, their flanks drawn, and their eyes staring. Clem knew the men had about reached the limit of human endurance.

"Howdy," he said. "You and four others come with me. Hold the fort, John. I'm going to see if those fellows still want to fight."

Ellie started up from her couch of bloody sand, and caught at Clem's arm as he passed her.

"Steady!" he whispered. "Keep down there. I'll be back in five minutes." He passed on toward the river with his men.

Ellie lay tensely listening, her heart pounding terrifically. There was not a sound. Presently, Clem and his men returned, and he said to John Hoard:

"There doesn't seem to be anybody down that way. I went to look for the bodies of our two men who were killed on the bar last night, but the river has swept them away."

"We got to have water pretty soon,

Clem," said Hoard. "A hawk couldn't drink that sand soup in the river."

"We'll get water. Swing the boat around and get the horses on it."

A few minutes later, the boat, with two men and all the horses on it, pushed off, while Clem, Howdy, John Hoard, and the rest watched. The clumsy old ferry glided out into the current, then sped across, with its pulleys creaking on the cable.

The horses were put ashore, and the boat returned. Without a word, Clem took Ellie up bodily in his arms, and carried her on the boat and laid her down behind the high gunwale. It was a tense moment when the boat pushed off with all the men on board. It was a desperate chance. The Folder gang had had time to form again, and in that open boat Clem and his men would be easy prey.

But no shot was fired from those willows. There was no one there to fire it. Unknown to themselves, that little band of Bar 6 riders had ended the activities of the Folder gang.

UP from the swirling river trailed the Bar 6 men. They had caught Banty's horse, which Ellie had left on the Texas side. Of the original fifteen, only twelve were present. Some of them had slight flesh wounds. All were weak from hunger and thirst, for no one could drink the thick, muddy, filthy water of the raging river. Ellie rode among them. Clem had not spoken a dozen words to her since he laid her on the ground in his stronghold among the willows. He had just kept near her, ever watchful for her safety and comfort.

Clem and Ellie went to the house, while the men went on to the bunk shack. Dr. Bowden, gaunt and hollow-eyed, met them at the steps. Ellie

slipped by him and on into the house, for she wore a pair of overalls and a jumper that she had found at the bunk shack.

"How's Uncle Wash?" asked Clem.

"Fine and dandy, if he ever wakes up, but Mrs. Baines is a nervous wreck. When she found out that fool girl was gone, she went plumb loco. It was the damndest night I ever spent in my life."

"Same here," said Clem, with a wry grin. "What became of Banty?"

"I laid him out in the shack where the sick boys were. He ought to have a monument a mile high, and Ellie ought to have—everything on earth, even if she did damn nigh drive her Aunt Nora crazy."

In the house, Aunt Nora was hugging Ellie.

"What on earth made you do such a thing?" Aunt Nora asked.

"I—I just had to. I couldn't help it. Clem—"

"Oh, Clem! God bless you for a real woman! Go get them outlandish rags off and put on a fresh dress."

Dr. Bowden forced Ellie to take a sedative for her shattered nerves and go to bed, where she promptly fell asleep.

About noon old Wash Baines came out of his trance, and said:

"Gosh! I feel like I'd slept a week, doc, and I'm damn nigh starved. Ain't you got something cooked, Nora, that'll keep me alive until feedin' time?"

The men had gone to the bunk shack. If the remnant of the Folder gang meant to try to ride the Bar 6 again, they'd have to wait until the river went down. Meantime, they would get some sleep, Clem with the rest.

Dr. Bowden rode away from the Bar 6 soon after noon. He wasn't

needed, he wanted sleep, and he had to send an ambulance after Banty's body.

"Yes, sir, a monument a mile high is what I said," mused the doctor, as he rode on toward Lone Elm. "Furthermore and also, if that damn fool Clem Saddler lets that girl get away from him, I'll poison him the next time he has a bilious spell."

THE men had roused, eaten supper, and gone back to sleep the clock around again. For two hours Clem had sat on the steps of the bunk shack. He hadn't been to the house since morning, but he had to go now.

"I may be mistaken," he mused, "but I'll go crazy if I don't find out," and he walked on in the gathering shadows toward the old ranch house.

As he reached the top of the steps, something white, which was almost lost in one of the chairs, moved, and a moment later Ellie stood before him.

"Hello, Ellie!" he said. "Are you feeling all right?"

"Yes. I slept all day."

"Ellie, I'm a sorty thick-headed fool, and I want you to tell me if I've made a mistake."

"Mistake about what?"

"When you rode right square into the middle of hell with those cartridges, was you thinking about the Bar 6?"

"I—Clem, you oughtn't to ask me that. I wasn't thinking about anything or anybody but you."

"Then I wasn't mistaken."

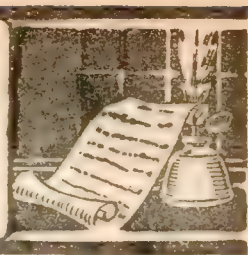
A few minutes later, when Aunt Nora stepped out onto the old gallery, Ellie broke away from Clem's arms. Aunt Nora silently embraced the girl and kissed her, then said:

"Go on back to him, honey. I'll go tell Wash. It'll do him more good than all the doctor's medicine."



Argonotes

The Readers' Viewpoint



HEY, RUBE!

JOHN WILSTACH always has a bit of circus gossip to pass along with his stories of the big top. About his story, "Hey, Rube!" in this issue, he tells us:

"Hey, Rube" is the circus rallying cry. It is really a shortening of "Hey, run to the rescue; here come the Rubes, with blood in their eyes." Many a time and oft have unruly farmers, sore because of having been trimmed, been run off the lot, with bodies battered by stake poles. Of course sometimes they deserved it. A classic story, with the John Robinson show, was of a couple of burly Texans who tried to crash the gate without paying for admission. When stopped by a ticket taker one of them pulled a big six-gun and jabbed it in the ticket man's stomach, with the remark: "Thar's my ticket." With a bit of assistance he was given the bum's rush. Old Gil Robinson, who recently died, told me it got so bad at times in the South that he went armed like a bandit. One of my treasured pictures is of him on the door, a cartridge belt around his waist and armed with a musket.

Opposition fights between circuses are not entirely a thing of the past. Fact is, they got so bad that circuses found it to their mutual advantage to divide territory by arrangement—or, better still, to buy up rivals. The Ringling Brothers killed opposition by purchasing Forepaugh & Sells Brothers and also the Barnum & Bailey outfit. Covering the other show's paper is still done by brigades of bill posters. Once upon a time John Robinson knew that Barnum was coming South, where he ruled as a circus king. So John copied all the Barnum heralds and throw-away advertising stuff. When P. T.'s outfit came along the natives said: "Can you imagine that Yankee clockmaker copying Uncle John's stuff and trying to get away with it?" They thought the invader a cheap, no-good rival, and his tour was a flop.

Though the rubes were generally beaten in fights with circus folks, history on the subjects tells us the battles were not entirely one-sided. Gerald Fitzgerald told me that the Ben Wallace show often had to fight its way

out of town and shoot from the cars to stop being moved. There is one true tale I dug up about an outfit that was driven from a small town in Texas, and halfway across the State, where they had to give up stand after stand—and landing in Galveston had to take to the boat for New Orleans—to get away from the army of infuriated rubes that continued an effective guerrilla warfare against the show.

SEVERAL of our readers have made the suggestion embodied in the following letter. If it were possible to accede to this request we should be glad to do so, but mechanical conditions to be met in making-up the magazine unfortunately make this impossible:

Columbus, Ohio.

The ARGOSY is the only magazine which is looked forward to by myself and others here. Some time ago I read of one person who saves stories by tearing the magazine apart and binding together the stories he likes best. Since then I have started the same kind of collection, with the exception of getting, as far as possible, stories by each of my favorite authors together in one binding. However, difficulties arise in nearly every issue. You see, I like most of the continued stories and a good many of the short stories and novellettes. Now, on attempting to bind these separately, I find that very often one must lose a good story on account of the fact that its first page is on the opposite side of the last page of another which I also want to keep, but under another binding. It seems to me that if you could see your way clear to end and begin stories in such a way that one could save two consecutive stories in a magazine, more readers would keep an ARGOSY library, for it surely is well worth the time and trouble.

Allow me to congratulate you for giving us such a splendid magazine, and on your selection of stories. I have preferences, of course, but why bother about that? The stories are all good, and it is not compulsory to read them all to get the full value from the magazine. Any one of them is worth the price of the book.

LEWIS K. ALDERMAN.

SOME "best story" nominations from North Dakota:

Minot, N. D.

Your magazine has put out some dandy novels lately. Would like to see you cut out short stories and add another serial. Your best story writers are Edgar Rice Burroughs, Charles A. Seltzer, Frank L. Packard, Charles F. Coe, George F. Worts, W. Wirt, Fred MacIsaac, Kenneth Perkins, Mason and all your impossible and mystery story writers.

The best stories I have read in your magazine are: "The Bandit of Hell's Bend," "The Apache Devil," "The Raider," "The Radio Flyers," "Six Foot Lightning," "Man-Hunt," "War Chief," "The Tarzan Tales," "The Big Shot," "The Silver Fang," "The Spectral Passenger," and your tales by LaMaster and Ray Cummings.

Keep the ARGOSY like it is. A magazine of every kind of story.

CLARENCE O. LYSTED.

A REQUEST for another *Mme. Storey* yarn. Fine—there is another one on the schedule for the near future:

New London, Conn.

I enjoy every bit of each ARGOSY. The short articles are both interesting and educating.

Am afraid that "The Shadow Girl" was another impossible story; something that could never happen. Still, to me, these stories are always interesting, for if it were not for imagination this would be a pretty dull old world.

"Blood on the Snow" was a bit different and a good story, but the ending, somehow, seemed rather abrupt.

"Marjola's Ring" and "The Word of Adjutant Kent" were two more out-of-the-ordinary stories. Perhaps because the author left his women alone in each.

"Phantom Bullets," "The Lost Lagoon," "The Big Shot," "The Radio Flyers," "Menacing Shadows," "Moon Calf," and "By Allah Who Made Tigers" were also interesting, and with the different touch.

Would like to hear from *Mme. Storey* and *Bella* again, soon.

MRS. L. T. SHERMAN.

A NEW ARGOSY convert tells us why he is:

Somerville, Mass.

I have just read the first installment of "Death's Domain," and if it is as good as the rest of your scientific and fantastic stories, I will boost your magazine sky-high. Among

my favorites are Ray Cummings, W. Wirt, Theodore Roscoe, Lieut. John Hopper and F. V. W. Mason. I am a reader of your fantastic stories and I liked them all, "Shadow Girl," "The Planet of Peril," "The Radio Flyers" and "Monkey Eyes."

F. V. W. Mason is first-rate with me as a writer. "The Word of Adjutant Kent" was the first of his stories I read; "Captain Nemesis" second, and "Death's Domain" third. All of them have been full of adventure, fight and cunning strategy.

Theodore Roscoe is another good one; W. Wirt, also. Your Western stories have good names, but do not interest me. Fred MacIsaac is not in my favorite list, but his latest serial looks like a good one, so I am reading it.

Keep up the good work, the magazine is a pippin, rating first with any of the twenty or twenty-five cent magazines now in publication. I am a new member in the ARGOSY crowd.

JOHN J. COUGHLAN, JR.

SOME more favorite nominations:

Bronx, N. Y.

I am pleased to see the excellent stories that have run in the ARGOSY lately. Some that I liked were: "Captain Nemesis," "The Branded Man," "Man-Hunt," "Swords Are Out!" "Bluffer's Luck," "The Planet of Peril" and "Jolly Flies the Roger." Some of my favorite authors are Fred MacIsaac, F. V. W. Mason, W. Wirt, O. A. Kline, Slater LaMaster, Ray Cummings and Joseph Ivers Lawrence. Glad to see Kenneth Perkins back with a Western.

SID LOWENTHAL.

QUITE an outbreak from a fan in Munsonville, N. H.:

Munsonville, N. H.

At various times in my life I have broken out with the measles, chicken-pox and other kindred rashes. But if this gets by you it will be the first time I ever broke out in print.

The reason for this letter is to exchange ten coupons for one of your story headings. Also to sound a few notes of praise that should cry down the dislikes mentioned.

Let's get the worst over with now. There have been but two stories in the past two years that did not deserve to get into print. They were "Luckett of the Moon" and "Every Minute Counts." The yarns of W. Wirt are interesting, even though the bloodshed is always confined to the ranks of the enemy. Wish you would suggest to him that he quit wading in blood for a while.

MacIsaac, Worts, Dunn, Cummings and Lawrence are a quintet hard to beat and the

YOUR CHOICE COUPON

Editor, ARGOSY,
280 Broadway, N. Y. C., N. Y.

The stories I like best in this issue of the magazine are as follows:

1.....

2.....

3.....

4.....

5.....

I did not like.....
because.....

Name.....

Street.....

City..... State.....

10-26

short stories of Thompson are deserving of more praise than they are getting.

The best of your recent serials are "He Rules Who Can," "The Phantom in the Rainbow," "Queen of Clubs," "Trouble Ranch," "The Crime Circus," "Adventurers All," "Blue Steel," "Heartbreak Trail," "Captain Nemesis," "The Spectral Passenger"; and I can still remember a novelette called "Drums of the Leopardmen."

Personally I'd like a few more short stories each week and a higher grade of W. Sterns.

Hail King ARGOSY, and confusion to its enemies.
RALPH G. PAGE.

FANTASTIC and historical stories seem to be this reader's meat:

Wilmington, Del.

I have been reading ARGOSY for quite a number of years and thought I should write to tell you how much I enjoy your magazine. I think ARGOSY is the best magazine published.

My favorite authors are Edgar Rice Burroughs, Ralph Milne Farley, Fred MacIsaac, Lieut. John Hopper, Otis Adelbert Kline and W. Wirt.

What about some more stories of ancient England, from Talbot Mundy? "The Planet of Peril" is great. I like the fantastic and historical stories best, but all of the stories in ARGOSY are fine.
JOHN MUNROE.



Looking Ahead!

Last of the great unexplored areas of the Earth's surface is Antarctica. While all eyes are turned on Commander Byrd's expedition in this great snowy waste

RAY CUMMINGS

takes us there in

THE SNOW GIRL

his latest novel, which begins next week. A strange and unusual story—and one that is particularly interesting and significant at this time

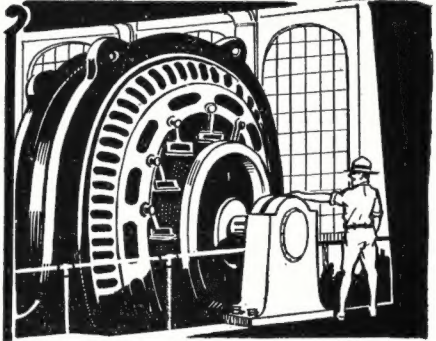
The Dark Brotherhood—by William Corcoran

is undoubtedly one of the strongest novelettes we have published. A powerful story about a powerful, two-fisted fighter who faced a tough problem—and met it in his own way.

COMING TO YOU IN THE ARGOSY OF NOVEMBER 2nd



You Fellows Who Want BIG PAY Get into



WHY earn \$15 or \$20 or \$30 a week, when in the same six days as an Electrical Expert, you can make \$60 to \$100 — and do it easier — not work half so hard. Why, then, remain in a small-pay, no-future job that offers no chance for big promotion — no chance for big income? Fit yourself for a real job. **Get into Electricity.** That's where the big money is being made, and always will be made.

Electricity — The Big Pay Field

Today even the ordinary Electrician — the "screw driver" kind — is making money — big money. But it's the trained man — the Electrical Expert — who makes the really big money — \$10 to \$20 a day — \$60 to \$100 a week. Be a Big-Pay man, yourself. Get in line, now, for one of these "Big-Pay" Jobs.

I'll Train You At Home

I'll train you at home, — in your spare time. You work just as you are working now — at your same job. My now famous "Work-Sheet and Job-Ticket" method, guarantees you simplified, practical training along work-shop lines. In a few short months you can step out of your old job into a new job — into electrical work where you can be a Big-Pay man in this Big-Pay field.

You Earn As You Learn

To learn Electricity my way you don't have to be a College man, or even a High School graduate. You can read. You can write. That's enough. With me, you get experience as you go along and make good money while learning. I'll show you how, — and I'll give you, without extra cost tools and apparatus to work with — 6 Big Outfits in all.

Money Back If Not Satisfied

That's what I agree to do. And back of me in this agreement stands the Chicago Engineering Works, a \$2,000,000 Illinois Corporation. There's nothing like "Cooke" Training, anywhere. It's the Training that big Electrical men are praising; it's the Training that employers recommend; it's the Training that one of our greatest Engineering societies, has endorsed 100 percent. It's the Training for you.

If You're Earning Less Than \$70 A Week — Investigate

Don't wait a minute! Find out today why "The Cooke Trained man is the Big-Pay Man", everywhere! Find out how "Cooke" Training will help you boost your pay! Mail coupon right now for my Big FREE Book of Facts. See the Six Big Working-Outfits I give you without extra charge. See the hundreds of pictures, the proofs, the Big-Pay letters of other "Cooke" Trained Men. Get this great free Book. Send for it today. Clip, sign, and mail coupon RIGHT NOW!

L. L. COOKE, Chief Instruction Engineer

**L. L. COOKE SCHOOL
OF ELECTRICITY**
Dept. 177

2150 Lawrence Ave.
Chicago, Illinois



\$30 A DAY

Dear Mr. Cooke:
I was making \$25 a week when I enrolled. Now with my own Electrical Shop I make as high as \$30 a day.
A. J. Daigneault,
225 Worcester,
Mass.



\$1.50 AN HOUR

Dear Mr. Cooke:
I had to work like a slave for 46c an hour before I enrolled. Now, thanks to you, Mr. Cooke, I make \$1.50 an hour.
G. W. Opren,
4220 N. Meade Av.
Chicago, Ill.

**6 BIG
OUTFITS
NO EXTRA
COST**



ELECTRICITY

*Hundreds of Men
I have trained
are now earning*

**\$60 to \$100
A WEEK**

So Can You

**If you
earn less
than \$70
a week
INVESTIGATE
ACT
NOW**



I'll train you at home in a few short months.
L. L. COOKE

FREE BOOK COUPON

L. L. COOKE, Chief Instruction Engineer,
Dept. 177, 2150 Lawrence Ave., Chicago, Ill.

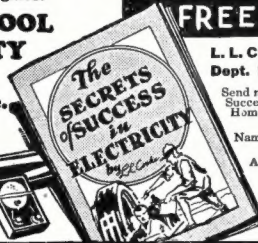
Send me FREE and prepaid, your Big Book "Secrets of Success in Electricity," with all details about your Home Study Course in Electricity.

Name

Address

City State

Residents of Canada send coupon to L. A. Farrow, Special Representative, 7 Medbury Lane, East Windsor, Ontario, Canada.



The "Cooke" Trained Man is the "Big Pay" Man

ONLY \$1 DOWN

Pay no more
until Dec. 1st

**Heats 3 to 4
Rooms
Holds Fire For
24 Hours**

SAVES YOU \$25—Here's the greatest Heater—and the greatest Heater OFFER ever made! Think—only \$41.95—for a beautiful All Enamel Circulating Home Heater with the biggest heating improvements in 10 years! Think—only \$1 Down—not another cent until Dec. 1st, then start easy monthly payments! *Nothing to Pay All Fall.* 30 Days FREE Trial. Over a Year to Pay. You save \$25 on this "Heat Master." That is because Spear buys thousands! You save 25% in fuel. That's because of Spear improvements. Cheerful, healthful heat throughout your home.

Note these sensational improvements! It has a new furnace type check damper in the smoke pipe. It heats 3 to 4 rooms—comfortably. Takes the place of several old style stoves! It holds fire 24 hours! Bank it like a furnace at night—have a glowing fire in the morning. Ash pit, ash door and draft slide are machine ground, insuring perfect draft control. It is as efficient as a furnace. June warmth in your home all winter. No chills, no ills, no doctor bills. Only \$1 down brings it to your home.

Circulates Warm, Moist Air

—See small illustration. It shows how cold air enters at the bottom, and is warmed by contact with the cast iron heating unit. Warm air then passes out through the ornamental grill at the top, being healthfully moistened on the way by the humidifier. The warm air rising, forces the cooler air to lower levels, where it, in turn, is heated and sent all through the house. No cold corners, cold walls, or drafty floors with this heater!

Walnut or Mahogany. You may have this handsome heater either in Walnut or Mahogany Enamel finish. It matches your finest furniture. No chipping, no cracking, no peeling. No polishing either—simply wipe occasionally with a damp cloth. Mica panels in the fire door give you fireplace coziness. You're sure to be pleased with it. Send for it today!

Fine Large Size. Do not confuse this big Heater with small 14 and 16-in. heaters. It is 43 in. high—occupies 25 x 17 in. floor space. Extra large fire pot, 18 x 11 x 8 in. All cast iron heating dome molded in one piece, forever preventing cracking or smoking. Outer cabinet is heavy gauge steel with Armco Enameling Iron. Big feed door, 14 x 7 7/8 inches. Ash pit door, 14 x 7 inches. Heater takes 7-inch pipe. Elbow, ash pan and shaker included. Humidifier is four-quart Porcelain Enamel Pan.



© 1929
Spear & Co.

**30 Days
FREE Trial
Year to Pay**

Order now. Save on the cost of your winter's coal. Pay only \$1 Down—nothing more until Dec. 1st. Then start regular monthly payments. Take 30 days FREE Trial—Over a Year to Pay. If you are not completely satisfied, return the Heater, and we will refund your first payment and transportation charges both ways. You risk nothing.

Order No. G A 2600, "Heat Master" Circulating Home Heater. Mahogany or Walnut finish. Sale Price, \$41.95. Terms: \$1 with order; \$3.50 monthly.

Nathaniel Spear
President

→ Spear & Co. ←

Dept. M 50 PITTSBURGH, PA.

*Home Furnishers to the People of
America for 36 Years*

**NOW
\$41.95**

**ONLY
\$1
DOWN**

Open View.
Cold Air
Heated
Between
Inner and
Outer
Walls,
Circulates
Into Room.

MAIL COUPON TO-DAY

SPEAR & CO., Dept. M 50, PITTSBURGH, PA.
Send me at once the "Heat Master" Circulating Heater described above. Enclosed is \$1 first payment. It is understood that after 30 days trial, if I am satisfied, I will send you \$3.50 monthly. Order No. G A 2600. Price \$41.95. Title remains with you until paid in full.

If you want Mahogany finish put an X here ☐
If you want Walnut finish put an X here ☐

Name _____
R. F. D. _____
Box No. or _____
Street and No. _____ State _____
Post Office _____
If you want our FREE Catalog of Home Furnishings only, send no money, put an X in square and write name and address plainly on above lines. ☐
CATALOG FREE